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By author of the "Indian Chief."

A TALE OF LIFE IN MEXICO.

THE

RED TRACK.

BY

GUSTAVE AIMARD.

AUTHOR OF "THE PRAIRIE FLOWER," "THE INDIAN SCOUT," "THE TRAIL HUNTER," "PIRATES OF THE PRAIRIES," "THE TRAPPER'S DAUGHTER," "THE GOLD SEEKERS," "THE TIGER SLAYER," "THE INDIAN CHIEF," "THE BORDER RIFLES," "THE FREE-BOOTERS," "THE WHITE SCALPER," "TRAPPERS OF ARKANSAW," "THE CHIEF OF THE AMAS," "LAST OF THE INCAS," "THE QUEEN OF THE SAVANNAH," "THE ADVENTURERS," "THE TRAPPERS," "THE PEARLS OF THE ANDES," "THE SMUGGLER," "STRONGHAND, OR THE NOBLE REVENGE," ETC., ETC., ETC.

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P R E F A C E

THE present volume of GUSTAVE AIMARD's works is a continuation of the "Indian Chief," and conclusion of the series comprising that work, the "Gold Seekers," and the "Tiger Slayer."

At the present moment, while the French are engaged in a war with Mexico, I feel assured that the extraordinary and startling descriptions given in this volume of the social condition and mode of life in the capital of that country will be read with universal gratification; for I can assert confidently that no previous writer has ever produced such a graphic and truthful account of a city with which the illustrated papers are now making us thoroughly acquainted.

If a further recommendation be needed, it will be found in the fact that the present volume appears in an English garb before being introduced to French readers. GUSTAVE AIMARD is so gratified with the reception his works have found in this country, through my poor assistance, that he has considered he could not supply a better proof of his thankfulness than by permitting his English readers to enjoy, on this occasion, the first-fruits of his versatile and clever pen. This is a compliment which, I trust, will be duly appreciated; for, as to the merits of the work itself, I have not the slightest doubt. Readers may imagine it impossible for GUSTAVE AIMARD to surpass his previous triumphs in the wildly romantic, or that he could invent any thing equal to the "Prairie Flower," a work which I venture to affirm to be the finest Indian tale ever yet written, in spite of the great authors who have preceded AIMARD; but I ask my reader's special admiration for the "Red Track," because in it our favorite author strikes out a new path, and displays a versatility which puts to the blush those bilious critics, few in number, I grant, among the multitude of encouraging reviewers, who have ventured an opinion that GUSTAVE AIMARD can only write about Indian life, or, in point of fact, that he is merely a hunter describing his own experiences under a transparent disguise.

Well, be it so; I accept the assertion. GUSTAVE AIMARD is but a hunter; he has seen nought but uncivilized life; he has spent years among savages, and has returned to his own country to try and grow Europeanized again. What

then? The very objection is a proof of his veracity; and I am fully of the conviction that every story he has told us is true. It is not reasonable to suppose that a man who has spent the greater part of his life in hunting the wild animals of America—who has been an adopted son of the most powerful Indian tribes—who has for years never known what the morrow would bring forth, should sit down to invent. The storehouse of his mind is too amply filled with marvels for him to take that needless trouble, and he simply repeats on paper the tales which in olden times he picked up at the camp-fires, or heard during his wanderings with the wood-rangers.

And it is as such that I wish GUSTAVE AIMARD to be judged by English readers. His eminent quality is truth. He is a man who could not set down a falsehood, no matter what the bribe might be. He has lived through the incidents he describes, and has brought back to Europe the adventures of a chequered life. He does not attempt to fascinate his readers by a complicated plot. He does not possess the marvellous invention of a COOPER, who, after a slight acquaintance with a few powerless Indians, wrote books which all admirers of the English language peruse. But GUSTAVE AIMARD possesses a higher quality, in the fact that he only notes down incidents which he has seen, or which he has received on undoubted evidence from his companions.

The present is the twelfth volume of GUSTAVE AIMARD's works to which I have put my name; and, with the exception of a few captious criticisms whose motive may be read between the lines, the great body of the British Press has greeted our joint efforts with the heartiest applause. The success of this series has been unparalleled in the annals of cheap literature. Day by day the number of readers increases, and the publication of each successive volume creates an excitement which cannot fail to be most gratifying to the publishers.

To wind up this unusually long Preface, into which honest admiration for the author has alone induced me, I wish to say that it affords me an ever-recurring delight to introduce GUSTAVE AIMARD's works to English readers, while it causes me an extra pleasure, on this occasion, to be enabled to repeat that the present volume appears on this side of the Channel before it has been introduced to French readers. And, knowing as I do the number of editions through which AIMARD's books pass in his own native land, I can appreciate the sacrifice he has made on this occasion at its full value.

LASCELLES WRAXALL.

DRAYTON TERRACE, WEST BROMPTON.

London, December, 1863.

FROM "BENTLEY'S MISCELLANY."

WHAT may be termed savage literature always possesses a great fascination for the reader, and the few writers who have devoted themselves to that field have always secured ready perusal. Who is there among us who has not hung with breathless interest over the "Last of the Mohicans?" or followed the "Pathfinder" through the series of works that depict his adventurous career? Next came Ruxton, too soon taken from us, alas! but the few memorials he left showed how great a loss our literature suffered in him. Lastly, we have had Mayne Reid, who has his readers by tens of thousands, and whose novels are full of incident and vitality. Others have trod this field and have failed: in charity to them we will omit their names.

This literature has, hitherto, been almost indigenous to the Anglo-Americans, for no other nation has come so much in contact with the savages as those who sent forth these daring pioneers from North and South to drive the Indians further and further back from their hunting-grounds. Among Germans, the only persons who have touched on the Indians are Charles Sealsfield, in his "Cabin Book," and Kohl, who gave us his charming monogram of the Ojibbeways in his "Travels Round Lake Superior." The French had a very celebrated representative, Louis de Bellamare, better known as Gabriel Ferry, but even his deservedly great reputation, resting on his "Courreurs de Bois," has paled before the rising lustre of Gustave Aimard, who is at once the French Mayne Reid and Fennimore Cooper.

Aimard's Indian tales will be found superior to those of both the abovementioned authors, and for very simple reasons. Although Cooper possessed a great talent for inventing a story, the misfortune is, that the scene is laid within a very confined space: he deals with only the eastern tribes, those which the Yankee element came most into collision with; and these tribes, inexorably driven back before the white man, soon lost those salient points which distinguish the savage of the western prairies. The Tuscaroras and Delawares were not lords of the land after the landing of the first pale faces; they contended inch by inch of their territory, it is true, but their opponents had the prestige of victory, and the tribes, decimated by whiskey and white diseases, had not the energy left to resist. If they formed a confederation, it was but limited in its extent, and fell to pieces from internal dissension. Cooper was, therefore, virtually right in calling one of his books "The Last of the Mohicans," even though the scattered fragments of that race still exist beyond the Mississippi.

Mayne Reid, on the other hand, acted wisely in laying the scene of his stories among the untamable tribes of the western prairies—the Pawnees, the Apaches, and the Camanches—that haughty race which calls itself "Queen of the Prairies," and defies the white man. These tribes still lord it in the desert; they are constantly at war with the pale faces, and during the "Mexican moon" commit frightful ravages in Sonora and along the frontier. The de-

generate descendants of Cortez are unable to resist them, and they spread desolation on their path. Villages, even towns, are burned, the crops are ruthlessly destroyed, and the women led into captivity, to become the slaves of the red-skin warriors. Such men, though they be savages, supply a thrilling subject for the romance writer, and Mayne Reid did well in laying the scene of his Indian tales among them.

Unfortunately, however, when you have read one of Captain Reid's stories, you have read them all, for a marvellous likeness pervades them. The feeling cannot be overcome that, having exhausted his stock of personal observation in his earlier works, he repeats himself, or is obliged to fall back on reading. Another great defect in these otherwise charming tales is the utter absence of plot: you have incidents piled on incidents, but the conclusion lies as plainly before you as the town you are traveling to on a Dutch road. It may be that Mayne Reid, having to write for a popular periodical, does not display that artistic finish of which we believe him quite capable, and that, under different circumstances, he might produce works in every way satisfactory to his readers; but there is nothing more injurious, he should remember, to a popular author than the whispered "he is writing himself out," from which some of our best writers are now suffering, simply because, having made a reputation, they do nothing on their side to support it.

The case is very different, however, with the subject of our paper. Gustave Aimard has written some dozen Indian tales, all interesting and all unlike. The great charm of his stories is, indubitably, the vitality he manages to throw into them; and he writes with such spirit, that, while reading, you cannot but imagine that he is describing to you scenes of which he was an eye-witness. And this was very probably the case, for Aimard's life has been one which we defy the most practised romancer to out-romance. He has lived an age (for such an existence cannot be measured by years) among the savages. As adopted son of one of the most power-

ful Indian nations, he has fought, hunted, trapped by their side, and is thoroughly acquainted with their every ruse. But this is not all; and fortunately for his readers, he has gone through every phase of desert life. He has been in turn squatter, hunter, trapper, and miner, and has seen the mode of life of all the adventurers who traverse the Indian deserts in every direction. Twice he was led to the stake of torture by the Apaches, and only saved by a miracle; he wandered about alone for upwards of a month on the great Del Norte desert; he was a slave in one of the sacred cities of the Sun, and is probably the only European who returned alive from those gloomy caverns, where the sacred fire of Montezuma is still kept burning, carefully tended by the Vestals, as in ancient Rome; he was a prisoner for a lengthened period with the cruel and treacherous Patagonians—in a word, there is not a portion of uncivilized America, North or South, which he has not traversed, with his good rifle in hand, in defiance of the wild beasts and the still wilder and more dangerous inhabitants.

But even such a life as this would avail a man but little for literary pursuits, unless he possessed the gift of putting it in an attractive form, and this Gustave Aimard has in an eminent degree. He is endowed with all the qualities of a novelist, and while his works read so truthfully, they are of absorbing interest, owing to the clever way in which the author maintains the surprise, which is the great characteristic, even though an unworthy one, perhaps, of the successful novelist. With the first novel he produced on his return, "The Grand Chief of the Aucas," his reputation was established in France, and he has constantly marched to fresh triumphs. Nearly every month a fresh work is produced from his prolific pen; and yet, though we have read them all with unabated interest, we have not found an instance where he has repeated them, excepting, of course, where he has found it necessary to describe Indian manners and customs, which do not vary. Many of his earlier works have reached the sixth edition, and we may

safely say that he has a clientèle in Paris greater than even Paul de Kock had in his palmiest days.

It is no slight merit for a French author to achieve, that these works do not contain a single line which an English reader would wish away. M. Aimard is too truly a man to attempt corrupting the hearts and minds of his readers by high-flown sentiment; if we find fault with him at all, it is for investigating his Indian characters with too much humanity, and endowing them with attributes which are generally the boast of civilization alone. But he is the best judge of such matters: he has made the Indian character the study of his life, and we may safely accept at his hands a picture which we may deem too flattering, but which, after all, may be explained by the many-sided phases human life assumes, to the skin that covers white, red, or black. If Mrs. Stowe was allowed to rehabilitate the negro in "*Uncle Tom's Cabin*," surely, no fault is to be found with Gustave Aimard because he manfully upholds the men with whom he spent so many years of his life, and whom he learnt to love and admire in spite of their faults, which are, after all, inherent in their nature.

After the fashion of Fennimore Cooper, Aimard generally selects one hero, whom he accompanies through several volumes, although they are all complete in themselves, and require no elucidatory remarks. In one series, composed of "*The Pirates of the Prairies*," "*The Trapper's Daughter*," "*The Tiger Slayer*," "*The Gold Seeker*," and "*The Indian Chief*," his hero is the unfortunate Count de Raousset Boulbon, who fell a victim to Mexican ill-faith in 1848, and was shot like a dog by the governor of Sonora. His hapless fate created a sensation throughout Europe at the time, but faded away in presence of the weird political events that occupied all minds in that eventful year. Had the count been successful, he would have ranked in history by the side of Cortez and Pizarro, and his exploit of taking the fortified town of Hermosello, at the head of scarce three

hundred men, and with no guns, has hardly been surpassed in the history of modern warfare." No better hero for a romance could have offered; and while M. Aimard has adhered rather closely to facts, he has interwoven a web of human interest by sundry love passages that take place between the count and the daughter of his great enemy, the governor of Sonora.

Among all that is good, it is difficult to choose the best, but, in our opinion, "*The Flower of the Prairie*," and its sequel, the "*Indian Scout*," are the most successful of all M. Aimard's Indian stories, possibly because they deal more with civilization than the rest of the tales do. Perhaps our readers will not object to a short analysis of the plot, which we trust will impel them to seek the book itself.

In consequence of intrigues, Don Real de los Montes is obliged to fly from Mexico, leaving his wife and daughter in charge of his brother, Don Estevan. The latter, who had concocted the intrigue in the hope of succeeding to his brother's wealth, forces the ladies into a convent, where the mother dies, and the daughter, Doña Luisa, is immured alive in theoubliettes. Fortunately for her, her young lover, Don Leo de Torres, hears of this, breaks into the convent, carries her and a companion, Doña Laura, off, and flies into the desert. So eager, however, is Don Estevan's pursuit in order to destroy the last witness of his crime, that Don Leo is compelled to entrust the two ladies to Addick, an Apache chief, who conveys them to the City of the Sun, with the intention of never giving them up again. This Addick is a double rogue, and plays with both parties for his own profit. Under these circumstances, Bon-affût, the Eclaireur, or scout, makes his appearance, accompanied by another Canadian hunter, Balle-franche (the hero of a previous tale), and Eagle-head, a celebrated Camanche chief. Don Estevan is captured while arranging his villainy, and his brother, Don Mariano, arrives in the desert in time to accuse him before the terrible Court of Lynch Law. He is found guilty, and unceremoniously con-

demned to be buried alive, with his right hand free to clutch a pistol when he grows tired of his awful position.

Don Mariano, however, relents, and gives Balle-franche the hint to liberate him. He does so at the last moment, and receives his reward by being knocked on the head by the ungrateful villain, who makes off with his horse and joins the Apaches, to whom he consents to surrender the two ladies, on condition that none of his enemies leave the desert alive. On hearing the news from Balle-franche that Don Estevan is free, the gambusinos break up their camp at once, and hasten off in the hope of realizing the ladies before Don Estevan reaches the city.

The description of the march through the virgin forests is unique, and we would gladly quote illustrative passages, did our space permit. Suffice it to say that, after countless skirmishes with the Indians, they all arrive in sight of the Sacred City—to discover that the Apaches have reached it before them. At this moment Bon-affût appears as the Deus ex machina. Disguised as a medicine-man, and aided by Eagle-head, he manages to get into the Sacred City (the detailed description of which, by the way, is admirably done, and evidently by an eye-witness), and by stratagem, too long to describe, and would be spoiled in shortening, gets the ladies out. The Europeans fly, hotly pursued by the Indians, who are furious to avenge the sacrilege committed on their sacred ground, and the party at length enter Sonora to find the Indians before them, perpetrating the horrors of the Mexican Moon. They are beleaguered, and, after a frightful combat, are about to put an end to their lives, sooner than fall into the hands of their furious foes, when Eagle-head arrives at the head of the Camanches, and puts the Apaches to flight with immense slaughter.

This outline, naturally bald as it is, will serve to show the strong human interest of the story, and the powerful way in which it is worked out. But it would be hopeless for us to attempt to furnish any idea of the scenes that fill up the volume, and the countless delicate

touches the author gives to bring out the Indian character in all its glory. We feel convinced that Eagle-head will find as many admirers as the last chief of the Mohicans, for he is quite as inexorable and chivalrous. The character of his squaw, Fleur d'Eglantine, is also most exquisitely drawn, and altogether the volume produces an effect on the reader which cannot be described but must be felt. Whoever reads it on our recommendation, will, we feel assured, not be disappointed.

In a political point of view, these Indian tales possess considerable interest, as coming from one who has carefully studied the question. It is very remarkable to find, in the nineteenth century, that the savages, once driven back thousands of miles from the frontier of civilization by the Spanish conquistadors, are gradually regaining their ground, and forcing the Mexicans to retire in their turn. Large districts, once covered by haciendas, have now been regained to the desert; the presidios built to keep the invader at bay, have been ruined, and there is nothing to check the advance of the prairie Indians save their own desire to return home, after completing a successful raid, and enjoying the spoils. With the Americans advancing to the east and south, the savages on the west and north, Mexico must inevitably be swallowed up between them, and the great contest will commence.

But, putting this question aside, there is another and more cheerful aspect under which we may regard the great and deserved success of Aimard's Indian tales. It indicates that the reign of frivolity and immorality which has so long weighed down French literature is drawing to an end, and that a taste for healthier reading is being produced. That they are healthy reading we have already said; that they are deeply interesting does not admit of a doubt; and that they are decidedly the best of their sort is the opinion we entertain, and which we believe our readers will confirm when they have compared them with other works of the same nature offered them before.

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T H E R E D T R A C K.

B Y G U S T A V E A I M A R D.

CHAPTER I.

THE SIERRA OF THE WIND RIVER.

THE Rocky Mountains form an almost impassable barrier between California and the United States, properly so called; their formidable defiles, their rude valleys, and the vast western plains, watered by rapid streams, are even to the present day almost unknown to the American adventurers, and are rarely visited by the intrepid and daring Canadian trappers.

The majestic mountain range called the Sierra of the Wind River, especially offers a grand and striking picture, as it raises to the skies its white and snow-clad peaks, which extend indefinitely in a north-western direction, until they appear on the horizon like a white cloud, although the experienced eye of the trapper recognizes in this cloud the scarped outline of the Yellow-stone Mountains.

The Sierra of the Wind River is one of the most remarkable of the Rocky Mountain range; it forms, so to speak, an immense plateau, thirty leagues long, by ten or twelve in width, commanded by scarped peaks, crowned with eternal snows, and having at their base narrow and deep valleys filled with springs, streams, and rock-bound lakes. These magnificent reservoirs give rise to some of the mighty rivers which, after running for hundreds of miles through a picturesque territory, become on one side the affluents of the Missouri, on the other of the Columbia, and bear the tribute of their waters to the two oceans.

In the stories of the wood-rangers and trappers, the Sierra of the Wind River is justly renowned for its frightful gorges, and the wild country in its vicinity frequently serves as a refuge to the pirates of the prairie, and has been, many a time and oft, the scene of obstinate struggles between the white men and the Indians.

Toward the end of June, 1854, a well-mounted traveller, carefully wrapped up in the thick folds of a sarape, raised to his eyes, was following one of the most precipitous slopes of the Sierra of the Wind River, at no great distance from the source of the Green River, that great western Colorado which pours its waters into the Gulf of California.

It was about seven in the evening: the traveller rode along, shivering from the effects of an icy wind which whistled mournfully through the canons. All around had assumed a saddening aspect in the vacillating moonbeams. He rode on without hearing the footfall of his horse, as it fell on the winding sheet of snow that covered the landscape; at times the capricious windings of the track he was following compelled him to pass through thickets, whose branches, bent by the weight of snow, stood out before him like gigantic skeletons, and struck each other after he had passed with a sullen snap.

The traveller continued his journey, looking anxiously on both sides of him. His horse, fatigued by a long ride, hobbled at every step, and in spite of the repeated encouragement of its rider seemed determined to stop short, when, after suddenly turning an angle in the track, it suddenly entered a large clearing, where the close-growing grass formed a circle about forty yards in diameter, and the verdure formed a cheery contrast with the whiteness that surrounded it.

"Heaven be praised!" the traveller exclaimed in excellent French, and giving a start of pleasure; "here is a spot at last where I can camp for to-night, without any excessive inconvenience. I almost despaired of finding one."

While thus congratulating him-

self, the traveller had stopped his horse and dismounted. His first attention was paid to his horse, from which he removed saddle and bridle, and which he covered with his sarape, appearing to attach no importance to the cold, which was, however, extremely severe in these elevated regions. So soon as it was free, the animal, in spite of its fatigue, began browsing heartily on the grass, and thus reassured about his companion, the traveller began thinking about making the best arrangements possible for the night.

Tall, thin, active, with a lofty and capacious forehead, an intelligent blue eye, sparkling with boldness, the stranger appeared to have been long accustomed to desert life, and to find nothing extraordinary or peculiarly disagreeable in the somewhat precarious position in which he found himself at this moment.

He was a man who had reached about middle life, on whose brow grief, rather than the fatigue of the adventurous life of the desert, had formed deep wrinkles, and sown numerous silver threads in his thick light hair; his dress was a medium between that of the white trappers and the Mexican gambusinos; but it was easy to recognize, in spite of his complexion, bronzed by the seasons, that he was a stranger to the ground he trod, and that Europe had witnessed his birth.

After giving a final glance of satisfaction at his horse, which at intervals interrupted its repast to raise its delicate and intelligent head to him with an expression of pleasure, he carried his weapons and horse-trappings to the foot of a rather lofty rock, which offered him but a poor protection against the gusts of the night breeze, and then began collecting dry wood to light a watch-fire.

It was no easy task to find dry firewood at a spot almost denuded of trees, and whose soil, covered with snow, except in the clearing, allowed nothing to be distinguished; but the traveller was patient: he would not be beaten; and within an hour he had collected sufficient wood to feed through the night two such fires as he proposed kindling. The branches soon crackled, and a bright flame rose joyously in a long spiral to the sky.

"Ah!" said the traveller, who, like all men constrained to live alone, seemed to have contracted the habit of soliloquizing aloud, "the fire will do, so now for supper."

Then, fumbling in the aforgas, or double pockets which travellers always carry fastened to the saddle, he took from them all the requisite elements of a frugal meal; that is to say, cecina, pemmican, and several varas of tasajo, or meat dried in the sun. At the moment when, after shutting up his aforgas, the traveller raised his head to lay his meat on the embers to broil, he stopped motionless, with widely-opened mouth, and it was only through a mighty strength of will that he suppressed a cry of surprise and possibly of terror. Although no sound had revealed his presence, a man, leaning on a long rifle, was standing motionless before him, and gazing at him with profound attention.

At once mastering the emotion he felt, the traveller carefully laid the tasajo on the embers, and then, without removing his eye from this strange visitor, he stretched out his arm to grasp his rifle, while saying, in a tone of the most perfect indifference—

"Whether friend or foe, you are

welcome, mate. 'Tis a bitter night, so, if you are cold, warm yourself, and if you are hungry, eat. When your nerves have regained their elasticity, and your body its usual strength, we will have a frank explanation, such as men of honor ought to have."

The stranger remained silent for some seconds; then, after shaking his head several times, he commenced in a low and melancholy voice, as it were speaking to himself rather than replying to the question asked him—

"Can any human being really exist in whose heart a feeling of pity still remains?"

"Make the trial, mate," the traveller answered quickly, "by accepting, without hesitation, my hearty offer. Two men who meet in the desert must be friends at first sight, unless private reasons make them implacable enemies. Sit down by my side and eat."

This dialogue had been held in Spanish, a language the stranger spoke with a facility that proved his Mexican origin. He seemed to reflect for a moment, and then instantly made up his mind.

"I accept," he said, "for your voice is too sympathizing and your glance too frank to deceive."

"That is the way to speak," the traveller said, gayly. "Sit down and eat without further delay, for I confess to you that I am dying of hunger."

The stranger smiled sadly, and sat down on the ground by the traveller's side. The two men, thus strangely brought together by accident, then attacked with no ordinary vigor, which evidenced a long fast, the provisions placed before them. Still, while eating, the traveller did not fail to examine his

singular companion; and the following was the result of his observations.

The general appearance of the stranger was most wretched, and his ragged clothes scarce covered his bony, fleshless body; while his pale and sickly features were rendered more sad and gloomy by a thick, disordered beard that fell on his chest. His eyes, inflamed by fever, and surrounded by black circles, glistened with a sombre fire, and at times emitted flashes of magnetic radiance. His weapons were in as bad a condition as his clothes, and in the event of a fight this man, with the exception of his bodily strength, which must once have been great, but which privations of every description, and probably endured for a lengthened period, had exhausted, would not have been a formidable adversary for the traveller. Still, beneath this truly wretched appearance could be traced an organization crushed by grief. There was in this man something grand and sympathetic, which appeared to emanate from his person, and aroused not only pity but also respect for torture so proudly hidden and so nobly endured. This man, in short, ere he fell so low, must have been great, either in virtue or in vice; but assuredly there was nothing common about him, and a mighty heart beat in his bosom.

Such was the impression the stranger produced on his host, while both, without the interchange of a word, appealed an appetite sharpened by long hours of abstinence. Hunters' meals are short, and the present one lasted hardly a quarter of an hour. When it was over, the traveller rolled a cigarette, and, handing it to the stranger, said—

"Do you smoke?"

On this apparently so simple question being asked, a strange thing happened which will only be understood by smokers who, long accustomed to the weed, have for some reason or other been deprived of it for a lengthened period. The stranger's face was suddenly lit up by the effect of some internal emotion; his dull eye flashed, and, seizing the cigarette with a nervous tremor, he exclaimed, in a voice choked by an outburst of joy impossible to render—

"Yes, yes; I used to smoke."

There was a rather long silence, during which the two men slowly inhaled the smoke of their cigarettes, and indulged in thought. The wind howled fiercely over their heads, the eddying snow was piling up around them, and the echoes of the canons seemed to utter notes of complaint. It was a horrible night. Beyond the circle of light produced by the flickering flame of the watch-fire all was buried in dense gloom. The picture presented by these two men, seated in the desert, strangely illumined by the bluish flame, and smoking calmly while suspended above an unfathomable abyss, had something striking and awe-inspiring about it. When the traveller had finished his cigarette, he rolled another, and laid his tobacco-pouch between himself and his guest.

"Now that the ice is broken between us," he said in a friendly voice, "and that we have nearly formed an acquaintance—for we have been sitting at the same fire, and have eaten and smoked together—the moment has arrived, I fancy, for us to become thoroughly acquainted."

The stranger nodded his head silently. It was a gesture that could be interpreted affirmatively or nega-

tively, at pleasure. The traveller continued, with a good-humored smile,—

"I make not the slightest pretence to compel you to reveal your secrets, and you are at liberty to maintain your incognito without in any way offending me. Still, whatever may be the result, let me give you an example of frankness by telling you who I am. My story will not be long, and only consists of a very few words. France is my country, and I was born at Paris—which city, doubtless," he remarked, with a stifled sigh, "I shall never see again. Reasons too lengthy to trouble you with, and which would interest you but very slightly, led me to America. Chance, or Providence, perhaps, by guiding me to the desert, and arousing my instincts and aspirations for liberty, wished to make a wood-ranger of me, and I obeyed. For twenty years I have been traversing the prairies and great savannahs in every direction, and I shall probably continue to do so, till an Indian bullet comes from some thicket to stop my wanderings forever. Towns are hateful to me; passionately fond of the grand spectacles of nature, which elevate the thought, and draw the creature nearer to his Creator, I shall only mix myself up once again in the chaos of civilization in order to fulfil a vow made on the tomb of a friend. When I have done that, I shall fly to the most unknown deserts, in order to end a life henceforth useless, far from those men whose paltry passions and base and ignoble hatred have robbed me of the small amount of happiness to which I fancied I have a claim. And now, mate, you know me as well as I do myself. I will merely add, in conclusion, that my name among the white men, my country-

men, is Valentine Guillois, and among the red-skins, my adopted fathers, Koutcnepi—that is to say, 'The Valiant One.' I believe myself to be as honest and as brave as a man is permitted to be with his imperfect organization. I never did harm with the intention of doing so, and I have done services to my fellow-men as often as I had it in my power, without expecting from them thanks or gratitude."

The speech, which the hunter had commenced in that clear voice and with that careless accent habitual to him, terminated involuntarily, under the pressure of the flood of saddened memories that rose from his heart to his lips, in a low and inarticulate voice, and when he concluded, he let his head fall sadly on his chest, with a sigh that resembled a sob. The stranger regarded him for a moment with an expression of gentle commiseration.

"You have suffered," he said; "suffered in your love, suffered in your friendship. Your history is that of all men in this world: who of us, but at a given hour, has felt his courage yield beneath the weight of grief? You are alone, friendless, abandoned by all, a voluntary exile, far from the men who only inspire you with hatred and contempt; you prefer the society of wild beasts, less ferocious than they; but, at any rate, you live, while I am a dead man!"

The hunter started, and looked in amazement at the speaker.

"I suppose you think me mad?" he continued, with a melancholy smile; "reassure yourself, it is not so. I am in full possession of my senses; my head is cool, and my thoughts are clear and lucid. For all that though, I repeat to you, I am dead, dead in the sight of my relations and friends, dead to the

whole world in fine, and condemned to lead this wretched existence for an indefinite period. Mine is a strange story, and that you would recognize through one word, were you a Mexican, or had you travelled in certain regions of Mexico."

"Did I not tell you that, for twenty years, I have been travelling over every part of America?" the traveller replied, his curiosity being aroused to the highest pitch. "What is the word? Can you tell it me?"

"Why not? I am alluding to the name I bore while I was still a living name."

"What is that name?"

"It had acquired a certain celebrity, but I doubt whether, even if you have heard it mentioned, it has remained in your memory."

"Who knows? Perhaps you are mistaken."

"Well, since you insist, learn, then, that I was called Martial el Tigrero."

"You?" the hunter exclaimed, under the influence of the uttermost surprise; "why that is impossible!"

"Of course so, since I am dead," the stranger answered, bitterly.



CHAPTER II.

THE DEAD ALIVE.

THE Tigrero had let his head fall on his chest again, and seemed engaged with gloomy thoughts. The hunter, somewhat embarrassed by the turn the conversation had taken, and anxious to continue it, mechanically stirred up the fire with the blade of his navaja, while his eyes wandered around, and were at times

fixed on his companion with an expression of deep sympathy.

"Stay," he said, presently, as he thrust back with his foot a few embers that had rolled out; "pardon me, sir, any insult which my exclamation may seem to have contained. You have mistaken, I assure you, the meaning of my remarks; although, as we have never met, we are not such strangers as you suppose. I have known you for a long time."

The Tigrero raised his head, and looked at the hunter incredulously.

"You?" he muttered.

"Yes, I, caballero, and it will not be difficult to prove it to you."

"What good will it do?" he murmured; "what interest can I have in the fact of your knowing me?"

"My dear sir," the Frenchman continued, with several shakes of his head, "nothing happens in this world by the effect of chance. Above us, an intellect superior to ours directs every thing here below; and if we have been permitted to meet in a manner so strange and unexpected in these desolate regions, it is because Providence has designs with us which we cannot yet detect; let us, therefore, not attempt to resist God's will, for what He has resolved will happen: who knows whether I may not be unconsciously sent across your path to bring you a supreme consolation, or to supply you with the means to accomplish a long meditated vengeance, which you have hitherto deemed impossible?"

"I repeat to you, senor," the Tigrero replied, "that your words are those of a stout-hearted and brave man, and I feel involuntarily attracted towards you. I think with you, that this accidental meeting, after so many days of solitude and grief with a man of your stamp, can-

not be the effect of unintelligent chance, and that at a moment when, convinced of my impotence to escape from my present frightful situation, I was reduced to despair and almost resolved on suicide, the loyal hand you offer me can only be that of a friend. Question me, then, without hesitation, and I will answer with the utmost frankness."

"Thanks for that speech," the hunter said, with emotion, "for it proves that we are beginning to understand each other, and soon, I hope, we shall have no secrets; but I must, before all else, tell you how it is that I have known you for a long time, although you were not aware of the fact."

"Speak, senor, I am listening to you with the most earnest attention."

Valentine reflected for a moment, and then went on as follows:—

"Some months ago, in consequence of circumstances unnecessary to remind you of, but which you doubtless bear in mind, you met at the colony of Guetzalli a Frenchman and a Canadian hunter, with whom you eventually stood on most intimate terms."

"It is true," the Tigrero replied, with a nervous start, "and the Frenchman to whom you allude, is the Count de Prébois Crancé. Oh! I shall never be able to discharge the debt of gratitude I have contracted with him for the services he rendered me."

A sad smile curled the hunter's lip. "You no longer owe him any thing," he said, with a melancholy shake of the head.

"What do you mean?" the Tigrero exclaimed eagerly; "surely the count cannot be dead?"

"He is dead, caballero. He was assassinated on the shores of Guay-

mas. His murderers laid him in his tomb, and his blood, so treacherously shed, cries to heaven for vengeance; but patience, heaven will not permit this horrible crime to remain unpunished."

The hunter hurriedly wiped away the tears he had been unable to repress while speaking of the count, and went on, in a voice choked by the internal emotion which he strove in vain to conquer:—

"But let us, for the present, leave this sad reminiscence to slumber in our hearts. The count was my friend, my dearest friend, more than a brother to me: he often spoke about you to me, and several times told me your gloomy history, which terminated in a frightful catastrophe."

"Yes, yes," the Tigrero muttered. "It was, indeed, a frightful catastrophe. I would gladly have found death at the bottom of the abyss into which I rolled during my struggle with Black Bear, could I have saved her I loved; but God decreed it otherwise, and may his holy name be blessed and praised."

"Amen!" the hunter said, sadly turning his head away.

"Oh!" Don Martial continued a moment later, "I feel my recollections crowding upon me at this moment. I feel as if the veil that covers my memory is torn asunder, in order to recall events, already so distant, but which have left so deep an impression on my mind. I, too, recognize you now; you are the famous hunter whom the count was trying to find in the desert; but he did not call you by any of the names you have mentioned."

"I dare say," Valentine answered, "that he alluded to me as the 'Trail Hunter,' the name by which

the white hunters and the Indians of the Far West are accustomed to call me."

"Yes; oh, now I remember perfectly, that was indeed the name he gave you. You were right in saying that we had been long acquainted, though we had never met."

"And now that we meet in this desert," the hunter said offering his hand, "connected as we are by the memory of our deceased friend, shall we be friends?"

"No, not friends," the Tigrero exclaimed, as he heartily pressed the hunter's honest hand; "not friends, but brothers."

"Well, then, brothers, and each for the other against all comers," the hunter answered. "And now that you are convinced that curiosity plays no part in my eager desire to know what has befallen you since the moment when you so hurriedly left your friends, speak, Don Martial, and then I will tell you, in my turn, what are the motives that directed my steps to these desolate regions."

The Tigrero, in a few moments, began his narrative as follows:—

"My friends must have fancied me dead, hence I cannot blame them for having abandoned me, although they were, perhaps, too quick in doing so without an attempt either to recover my corpse, or assure themselves at least that I was really dead, and that assistance would be thrown away; but though I am ignorant of what happened in the cavern after my fall, the bodies left on the battle-field proved to me afterwards that they had a tough fight, and were compelled to fly before the Indians; hence, I say again that I do not blame them. You are aware that I was attacked by Black Bear at the moment when I believed that I had succeeded in saving those

whom I had sworn to protect. It was on the very verge of the pit that Black Bear and myself, enwreathed like two serpents, began a final and decisive struggle: at the moment when I had all but succeeded in foiling my enemy's desperate efforts, and was raising my arm to cut his throat, the war-yell of the Comanches suddenly burst forth at the entrance of the cavern. By a supreme effort the Apache chief succeeded in escaping from my clutch, bounded on his feet, and rushed towards Dona Anita, doubtless with the intention of carrying her off, as the unforeseen assistance arriving for us would prevent the accomplishment of his vengeance. But the maiden repulsed him with that strength which despair engenders, and sought refuge behind her father. Already severely wounded by two shots, the chief tottered back to the edge of the pit, where he lost his balance. Feeling that he was falling, by an instinctive gesture, or, perhaps, through a last sentiment of fury, he stretched out his arms as if to save himself, caught hold of me as I rose, half-stunned by my recent contest, and we both rolled down the pit, he with a triumphant laugh, and I with a shriek of despair. Forgive me for having described thus minutely the last incidents of this fight, but I was obliged to enter into these details to make you thoroughly understand by what providential chance I was saved, when I fancied myself hopelessly lost."

"Go on, go on," the hunter said, "I am listening to you with the greatest attention."

Don Martial continued:—

"The Indian was desperately wounded, and his last effort, in which he had placed all his remaining strength, cost him his life: it

was a corpse that dragged me down, for during the few seconds our fall lasted he did not make a movement. The pit was not so deep as I fancied, not more than twenty or five-and-twenty feet, and the sides were covered with plants and grass, which, although they bent beneath our weight, prevented us from falling perpendicularly. The chief was the first to reach the bottom of the abyss, and I fell upon his body, which deadened my fall, though it was serious enough entirely to deprive me of consciousness. I cannot say how long I remained in this state, but, from a calculation I made afterwards, my faint must have lasted two hours. I was aroused by a cold sensation which suddenly affected me. I opened my eyes again, and found myself in utter darkness. At the first moment it was impossible for me to account for the situation in which I found myself, or what events had placed me in it; but my memory gradually returned, my thoughts became more lucid, and I only desired to emerge as speedily as possible from the pit into which I had fallen. I was suffering fearfully, although I was not actually wounded. I had received numerous contusions in my fall, and the slightest movement caused me an atrocious pain, for I was so bruised and shaken. In my present state I must endure the evil patiently: attempting to scale the sides of the pit when my strength was completely exhausted would have been madness, and I therefore resigned myself to waiting. I was in complete darkness, but that did not trouble me greatly, as I had about me every thing necessary to light a fire. Within a few moments I had a light, and was enabled to look about me. I was lying at the bottom of a species of funnel, for the

pit grew narrower in its descent, which had greatly helped to deaden my fall; my feet and legs almost to the knee were bathed in a subterranean stream, while the upper part of my body leant against the corpse of the Indian chief. The spot where I found myself was thirty feet in circumference at the most, and I assured myself by the help of my light that the sides of the pit, entirely covered with creepers, and even sturdy shrubs, rose in a gentle slope, and would not be difficult to escalate when my strength had sufficiently returned. At this moment I could not dream of attempting the ascent, so I bravely made up my mind, and although my anxiety was great about the friends I had left in the cavern, I resolved to wait a few hours before proceeding to save myself. I remained thus for twenty hours at the bottom of the pit, *tête-à-tête* with my enemy's corpse. Many times during my excursions in the desert I had found myself in almost desperate situations, but never, I call heaven to witness, had I felt so completely abandoned and left in the hands of Providence. Still, however deplorable my position might be, I did not despair; in spite of the frightful pain I suffered. I had convinced myself that my limbs were in a satisfactory state, and that all I needed was patience. When I fancied my strength sufficiently restored, I lighted two torches, which I fixed in the ground, in order to see more clearly. I threw my rifle on my back, placed my navaja between my teeth, and clinging to the shrubs, by a desperate effort I began my ascent. I will not tell you of the difficulty I had in conquering the terrible shocks I was obliged to give my aching bones in surmounting almost unsurpassable obstacles; sufficient

for you to know that I reached the mouth of the pit after an hour and a half's struggle, in which I expended all the energy a man possesses who hopes to save himself. When I reached the floor of the cavern, I lay for more than half an hour on the sand, exhausted, panting, unable to make the slightest movement, scarce breathing, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, not even conscious of the frightful state into which I was plunged. Fortunately for me, this terrible condition did not last long, the refreshing air from without, reaching me through the passages of the cavern, recovered me, and restored the entire use of my mental faculties. The ground around me was covered with dead bodies, and there had, doubtless, been a terrible struggle between the white men and the red-skins. I sought in vain for the corpses of Dona Anita and her father. I breathed again, and hope re-entered my heart, for my sacrifice had not been fruitless. Those for whom I had given my life were saved, and I should see them again. This thought restored my courage, and I felt quite a different man. I rose without any excessive difficulty, and, supporting myself on my rifle, went toward the mouth of the cavern, after removing my stock of provision, and taking the two powder-horns from the stores I had previously *cashed*, and which my friends in their flight had not thought of removing. No words can describe the emotion I felt when, after a painful walk through the grotto, I at length reached the river-bank, and saw the sun once more: a man must have been in a similar desperate situation to understand the cry, or rather howl of joy which escaped from my surcharged bosom when I felt again the blessed sunbeams, and inhaled

the odorous breath of the savannah. By an unreflecting movement, though it was suggested by my heart, I fell on my knees, and piously clasping my hands, I thanked Him who had saved me, and who alone could do so. This prayer, and the simple thanks expressed by a grateful heart, were, I feel convinced, borne upwards to heaven on the wings of my guardian angel.

"As far as I could make out by the height of the sun, it was about the second hour of the tarde. The deepest silence prevailed around me; so far as the vision could extend, the prairie was deserted; Indians and pale faces had disappeared: I was alone, alone with that God who had saved me in so marvellous a fashion, and would not abandon me. Before going further, I took a little nourishment, which the exhaustion of my strength rendered necessary. When, in the company of Don Sylva de Torrès and his daughter, I had sought a refuge in the cavern, our horses had been abandoned with all the remaining forage in an adjacent clearing, and I was too well acquainted with the instinct of these noble animals to apprehend that they had fled. On the contrary, I knew that, if the hunters had not taken them away, I should find them at the very spot where I had left them. A horse was indispensable for use, for a dismounted man is lost in the desert, and hence I resolved to seek them. Rested by the long halt I had made, and feeling that my strength had almost returned, I proceeded without hesitation towards the forest. At my second call I heard a rather loud noise in a clump of trees; the shrubs parted, and my horse galloped up and gladly rubbed its intelligent head against my shoulder. I amply returned the caresses the faithful

companion of my adventures bestowed on me, and then returned to the cavern, where my saddle was. An hour later, mounted on my good horse, I bent my steps towards houses. My journey was a long one, owing to my state of weakness and prostration, and when I reached Sonora, the news I heard almost drove me mad. Don Sylva de Torrès had been killed in the fight with the Apaches, as was probably his daughter, for no one could tell me any thing about her. For a month I hovered between life and death; but God in his wisdom, doubtless, had decided that I should escape once again. When hardly convalescent, I dragged myself to the house of the only man competent of giving me precise and positive information about what I wanted to learn. This man refused to recognize me, although I had kept up intimate relations with him for many years. When I told him my name he laughed in my face, and when I insisted, he had me expelled by his peons, telling me that I was mad, that Don Martial was dead, and I an impostor. I went away with rage and despair in my heart. As if they had formed an agreement, all my friends to whom I presented myself refused to recognize me, so thoroughly was the report of my death believed, and it had been accepted by them as a certainty. All the efforts I attempted to dissipate this alarming mistake and prove the falsehood of the rumor, were in vain, for too many persons were interested in it being true, on account of the large estates I possessed; and also, I suppose, through a fear of injuring the man to whom I first applied—the only living relation of the Torrès family, who, through his high position, has immense influence in Sonora. What more need I tell you,

my friend? Disgusted in every way, heart-broken with grief, and recognizing the inutility of the efforts I made against the ingratitude and systematic bad faith of those with whom I had to deal, I left the town, and, mounting my horse, returned to the desert, seeking the most unknown spots and desolate regions in which to hide myself, and die whenever God decrees that I have suffered sufficiently, and recalls me to Him."

After saying this, the Tigrero was silent, and his head sunk gloomily on his chest.

"Brother," Valentine said gently to him, slightly touching his shoulder to attract his attention, "you have forgotten to tell me the name of that influential person who had you turned out of his house, and treated you as an impostor."

"That is true," Don Martial answered, "his name is Don Sebastian Guerrero, and he is military governor of the province of Sonora."

The hunter quickly started to his feet with an exclamation of joy.

"Don Martial," he said, "you may thank God for decreeing that we should meet in the desert, in order that the punishment of this man should be complete."

CHAPTER III.

THE COMPACT.

DON MARTIAL gazed at the hunter in amazement.

"What do you mean?" he asked him. "I don't understand you."

"You will soon do so, my friend," Valentine answered. "How long have you been roaming about this neighborhood?"

"Nearly two months."

"In that case you are well acquainted, I presume, with the mountains among which we are at this moment?"

"There is not a tree or a rock whose exact position I cannot tell, nor a wild-beast trail which I have not followed."

"Good: are we far from a spot called the 'Fort of the Chichimèques?'"

The Tigrero reflected for a moment.

"Do you know by what Indians these mountains are inhabited?" he at length asked.

"Yes—by poor wretches who call themselves the Root-Eaters, and whom the hunters and trappers designate by the name of the 'Worthy of Pity.' They are, I believe, timid, harmless creatures—a species of incomplete men, in whom brutal instincts have stifled the intellect; however, I only speak of them from hearsay, for I never saw one of the poor devils."

"You are perfectly well informed about them, and they are what you depict them. I have often had opportunities of meeting them, and have lamented the degree of brutalization into which this hapless race has fallen."

"Permit me to remark that I do not see what connection can exist between this unhappy tribe and the information I ask of you."

"There is a very great one. Since I have been roaming about these mountains, you are the first man of my color with whom I have consented to enter into relations. The Root-Eaters have neither history nor traditions. Their life is restricted to eating, drinking, and sleeping, and I have not learned from them any of the names given to the majestic peaks that surround

us. Hence, though I perfectly well know the spot to which you refer, unless you describe it differently, it will be impossible for me to tell you its exact position."

"That is true; but what you ask of me is very awkward, for this is the first time I have visited these parts, and it will be rather difficult for me to describe a place I am not acquainted with. Still, I will try. There is, not far from here, I believe, a road which traverses the Rocky Mountains obliquely, and runs from the United States to Santa Fé; at a certain spot this road must intersect another which leads to California."

"I am perfectly well acquainted with the roads to which you refer; and the caravans of emigrants, hunters, and miners follow them in going to California, or returning thence."

"Good! At the spot where these two roads cross they form a species of large square, surrounded on all sides by rocks that rise to a considerable height. Do you know the place I mean?"

"Yes," the Tigrero answered.

"Well, about two gun-shots from this square is a track winding nearly in an east-south-east course, along the side of the mountains. This track, at first so narrow that a horse even passes with difficulty, gradually widens till it reaches a species of esplanade, or terrace, if you like it better, which commands an extensive prospect; while on its edge are the remains of barbarous erections, which can, however, be easily recognized as an ancient parapet. This terrace is called the 'Fort of the Chichimèques,' though for what reason I cannot tell you."

"I know no more than you do on that head, although I can now assure you that I am perfectly acquainted with the place to which

you refer, and have often camped there on stormy nights, because there is a deep cavern, excavated by human hands, and divided into several passages, every turning of which I know, and which has offered me a precious shelter during those frightful tempests which, at intervals, overthrow the face of nature in these regions."

"I was not aware of the existence of this grotto," the hunter said, with a glad start, "and I thank you for having told me of it; it will be very useful for the execution of the plans I have formed. Are we any great distance from this terrace?"

"In a straight line, not more than five or six miles, and, if it were day, I could show it to you; but as we must ride round to reach the caravan road, which we are obliged to follow in order to reach the tracks, we have about three hours' ride before us."

"That is a trifle; for I was afraid I had lost my way in these mountains, which are strange to me. I am delighted to find that my old experience has not failed me this time, and that my hunter's instincts have not deceived me."

While saying this, Valentine had risen to explore the clearing. The storm had ceased, the wind had swept away the clouds, the deep-blue sky was studded with brilliant stars, and the moon profusely shed its rays, which imparted a fantastic appearance to the landscape by casting the shadows of the lofty trees athwart the snow, whose pallid carpet spread far as eye could see.

"'Tis a magnificent night," the hunter said, after carefully examining the sky for some moments. "It is an hour past midnight, and I do not feel the slightest inclination to sleep. Are you fatigued?"

"I am never so," the Tigrero answered, with a smile.

"All right: in that case you are like myself—a thorough wood-ranger. What do you think of a ride in this magnificent moonlight?"

"I think that, after a good supper and an interesting conversation, nothing so thoroughly restores the balance of a man's thoughts as a night ride in the company of a friend."

"Bravo! that is what I call speaking. Now, as every ride to be reasonable should have an object, we will go, if you have no objection, as far as the Fort of the Chichimèques."

"I was about to propose it; and, as we ride along, you will tell me in your turn what imperious motive compelled you to come to these unknown regions, and what the project is to which you alluded."

"As for that," the hunter said, with a knowing smile, "I cannot satisfy you; at any rate not for the present, as I wish you to have the pleasure of a surprise. But be easy, I will not put your patience to too long a trial."

"You will act as you think proper, for I trust entirely to you. I know not why, but I am persuaded, either through a sentiment or sympathy, that in doing your own business you will be doing mine at the same time."

"You are nearer the truth at this moment than you perhaps imagine, so be of good cheer, brother."

"The happy meeting has already made a different man of me," the Tigrero said, as he rose.

The hunter laid his hand on his shoulder. "One moment," he said to him; "before leaving this bivouac, where we met so providentially, let us clearly agree as to our

facts, so as to avoid any future misunderstanding."

"Be it so," Don Martial answered. "Let us make a compact in the Indian fashion, and woe to the one who breaks it."

"Well said, my friend," Valentine remarked, as he drew his knife from his belt. "Here is my navaja, brother; may it serve you as it has done me to avenge your wrongs and mine."

"I receive it in the face of that Heaven which I call as witness of the purity of my intentions. Take mine in exchange, and one-half my powder and bullets, brother."

"I accept it as a thing belonging to me, and here is half my ammunition for you; henceforth we cannot fire at one another, all is in common between us. Your friends will be my friends, and you will point out your enemies to me, so that I may aid you in your vengeance. My horse is yours."

"Mine belongs to you, and in a few moments I will place it at your service."

Then the two men, leaning shoulder to shoulder, with clasped hands, eyes fixed on heaven, and outstretched arm, uttered together the following words:

"I take GOD to witness that of my own free will, and without reservation, I take as my friend and brother the man whose hand is at this moment pressing mine. I will help him in every thing he asks of me, without hope of reward, ready by day and night to answer his first signal, without hesitation, and without reproach, even if he asked me for my life. I take this oath in the presence of GOD, who sees and hears me, and may He come to my help in all I undertake, and punish me if I ever break my oath."

There was something grand and

solemn in this simple act, performed by these two powerful men, beneath the pallid moonbeams, and in the heart of the desert, alone, far from all human society, face to face with GOD, confiding in each, and seeming thus to defy the whole world. After repeating the words of the oath, they kissed each other's lips in turn, then embraced, and finally shook hands again.

"Now let us be off, brother," Valentine said; "I confide in you as in myself; we shall succeed in triumphing over our enemies, and repaying them all the misery they have caused us."

"Wait for me ten minutes, brother; my horse is hidden close by."

"Go; and during that time I will saddle mine, which is henceforth yours."

Don Martial hurried away, leaving Valentine alone.

"This time," he muttered, "I believe that I have at length met the man I have been looking for so long, and whom I despaired to find; with him, Curumilla, and Belhumeur, I can begin the struggle, for I am certain I shall not be abandoned or treacherously surrendered to the enemy I wish to combat."

While indulging after his wont in this soliloquy, the hunter had lassoed his horse, and was busily engaged in saddling it. He had just put the bit in its mouth, when the Tigrero re-entered the clearing, mounted on a magnificent black steed.

Don Martial dismounted.

"This is your horse, my friend," he said.

"And this is yours."

The exchange thus effected, the two men mounted, and left the clearing in which they had met so strangely. The Tigrero had told no

falsehood when he said that a metamorphosis had taken place in him, and that he felt a different man. His features had lost their marble-like rigidity; his eyes were animated, and no longer burned with a sombre and concentrated fire. Even though his glances were still somewhat haggard, their expression was more frank and, before all, kinder; he sat firm and upright in the saddle, and, in a word, seemed, ten years younger.

This unexpected change had not escaped the notice of the all-observing Frenchman, and he congratulated himself for having effected this moral cure, and saved a man of such promise from the despair which he had allowed to overpower him.

We have already said that it was a magnificent night. For men like our characters, accustomed to cross the desert in all weathers, the ride in the darkness was a relaxation rather than a fatigue. They rode along side by side, talking on indifferent topics—hunting, trapping, expeditions against the Indians—subjects always pleasing to wood-rangers, while rapidly advancing towards the spot they wished to reach.

“By-the-by,” Valentine all at once said, “I must warn you, brother, that if you are not mistaken, and we are really following the road to the Fort of the Chichimèques, we shall probably meet several persons there; they are friends of mine, with whom I have an appointment, and I will introduce them to you; for reasons you will speedily learn, these friends followed a different road from mine, and must have been waiting for some time at the place of meeting.”

“I do not care who the persons are we meet, as they are friends of yours,” the Tigrero answered; “the

main point is that we make no mistake.”

“On my word, I confess my incompetence, so far as that is concerned; this is the first time I have ventured into the Rocky Mountains, where I hope never to come again, and so I deliver myself entirely into your hands.”

“I will do my best, although I do not promise positively to lead you to the place you want to reach.”

“Nonsense!” the hunter said with a smile; “two places like the one I have described to you can hardly be found in these parts, picturesque and diversified though they be, and it would be almost impossible to lose our way.”

“At any rate,” the Tigrero answered, “we shall soon know what we have to depend on, for we shall be there within half an hour.”

The sky was beginning to grow paler; the horizon was belted by wide, pellucid bands, which assumed in turn every color of the rainbow. In the flashing uncertain light of dawn, objects were invested with a more fugitive appearance, although, on the other hand, they became more distinct.

The adventurers had passed the cross-roads, and turned into a narrow track, whose capricious windings ran along rocks, which were almost suspended over frightful abysses. The riders had given up all attempts to guide their horses, and trusted to their instinct; they had laid their bridles on their necks, leaving them at liberty to go where they pleased—a prudent precaution, which cannot be sufficiently recommended to travellers under similar circumstances.

All at once a streak of light illuminated the landscape, and the sun rose radiant and splendid; behind

them the travellers still had the shadows of night, while before them the snowy peaks of the mountains were glistening in the sun.

"Well," the hunter exclaimed, "we can now see clearly, and I hope that we shall soon perceive the Fort of the Chichimèques."

"Look ahead of you over the jagged crest of that hill," the Tigrero answered, stretching out his arm; "that is the terrace to which I am leading you."

The hunter stopped, for he felt giddy, and almost ready to fall off his horse. About two miles from him, but separated from the spot where he stood by an impassable canon, an immense esplanade stretched out into space in the shape of a *voladero*; that is to say, in consequence of one of those earthquakes so common in these regions, the base of the mountain had been undermined, while the crest remained intact, and hung for a considerable distance above a valley, apparently about to fall at any moment; the spectacle was at once imposing and terrific.

"Heaven forgive me!" the hunter muttered, "but I really believe I was frightened; I felt all my muscles tremble involuntarily. Oh! I will not look at it again; let us get along, my friend."

They set out again, still following the windings of the track, which gradually grew steeper; and, after a very zig-zag course, reached the terrace half an hour later.

"This is certainly the place," the hunter exclaimed, as he pointed to the decaying embers of a watch-fire.

"But your friends—?" the Tigrero asked.

"Did you not tell me there was a grotto close by?"

"I did."

"Well, they doubtless concealed

themselves in the grotto when they heard us approaching."

"That is possible."

"It is true: look."

The hunter discharged his gun, and at the sound three men appeared, though it was impossible to say whence they came. They were Belhumeur, Black Elk, and Eagle-head.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRAVELLERS.

WE must now leave Valentine and his companions on the esplanade of the Fort of the Chichimèques, where we shall join them again however, in order to attend to other persons destined to play an important part in the narrative we have undertaken to tell the reader.

About five or six leagues at the most from the spot where Valentine and the Tigrero met, a caravan, composed of some ten persons, had halted on the same night, and almost at the same moment as the hunter, in a narrow valley completely sheltered from the wind by dense clumps of trees.

The caravan was comfortably lodged on the bank of a running stream, the mules had been unloaded, a tent raised, fires lighted; and when the animals were hobbled, the travellers began to make preparations for their supper.

These travellers, or at any rate one of them, appeared to belong to the highest class, for the rest were only servants or Indian peons. Still the dress of this person was most simple, but his stiff manner, his imposing demeanor, and haughty

air, evidenced the man long accustomed to give his orders without admitting refusal or even the slightest hesitation.

He had passed his fiftieth year; he was tall, well-built, and his movements were extremely elegant. His broad forehead, his black eyes large and flashing, his long gray moustaches and his short hair gave him a military appearance, which his harsh, quick way of speaking did not contradict. Although he affected a certain affability of manner, he at times involuntarily betrayed himself, and it was easy to see that the modest garb of a Mexican Campesino which he wore was only a disguise. Instead of withdrawing beneath the tent prepared for him, this person had sat down before the fire with the peons, who eagerly made way for him with evident respect.

Among the peons two men more especially attracted attention. One was a red-skin, the other a half-breed, with a crafty, leering manner, who, for some reason or another, stood on more familiar terms with his master; his comrades called him No Carnero, and at times gave him the title of Capataz.

No Carnero was the wit of the caravan, the funny fellow—ever ready to laugh and joke, smoking an eternal cigar, and desperately strumming an insupportable guitar. Perhaps, though, he concealed beneath this frivolous appearance a more serious character and deeper thoughts than he would have liked to display.

The red-skin formed the most complete contrast with the capataz; he was a tall, thin, dry man, with angular features and gloomy and sad face, illumined by two black eyes deeply set in their orbit, but constantly in motion, and having

an undefinable expression; his aquiline nose, his wide mouth lined with large teeth as white as almonds, and his thin pinched-up lips, composed a far from pleasant countenance, which was rendered still more lugubrious by the obstinate silence of this man, who only spoke when absolutely compelled, and then only in monosyllables. Like all the Indians, it was impossible to form any opinion as to his age, for his hair was black as the raven's wing, and his parchment skin had not a single wrinkle; at any rate he seemed gifted with no ordinary strength.

He had engaged at Santa Fé to act as guide to the caravan, and, with the exception of his obstinate silence, there was every reason to be satisfied with the way in which he performed his duty. The peons called him The Indian, or sometimes José—a mocking term employed in Mexico to designate the *Indios mansos*; but the red-skin appeared as insensible to compliments as to jokes, and continued coldly to carry out the task he had imposed on himself. When supper was ended, and each had lit his pipe or cigarette, the master turned to the capataz.

"Carnero," he said to him, "although in such frightful weather, and in these remote regions, we have but little to fear from horse thieves, still do not fail to place sentries, for we cannot be too provident."

"I have warned two men, *mi amo*," the capataz replied; "and, moreover, I intend to make my rounds to-night; eh, José," he added, turning to the Indian, "are you certain you are not mistaken, and that you really lifted a trail!"

The red-skin shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and continued his quiet smoke.

"Do you know to what nation the sign you discovered belongs?" the master asked him.

The Indian gave a nod of assent.

"Is it a formidable nation?"

"Crow," the red-skin answered hoarsely.

"Carai!" the master exclaimed, "if they are Crows, we shall do well to be on our guard, for they are the cleverest plunderers in the Rocky Mountains."

"Nonsense!" Carnero remarked with a grin of derision, "do not believe what that man tells you; the mezcal has got into his head, and he is trying to make himself of importance; Indians tell as many lies as old women."

The Indian's eye flashed; without deigning to reply he drew a mocassin from his breast, and threw it so adroitly at the capataz as to strike him across the face. Furious at the insult so suddenly offered him by a man whom he always considered inoffensive, the half-breed uttered a yell of rage, and rushed knife in hand on the Indian.

But the latter had not taken his eye off him, and by a slight movement he avoided the desperate attack of the capataz; then drawing himself up, he caught him round the waist, raised him from the ground as easy as he would have done a child, and hurled him into the fire, where he writhed for a moment with cries of pain and impotent passion. When he at length got out of the fire, half scorched, he did not think of renewing the attack, but sat down growling and directing savage glances at his adversary, like a turnspit punished by a mastiff. The master had witnessed this aggression with the utmost indifference, and having picked up the mocassin, which he carefully examined—

"The Indian is right," he said, coldly, "this mocassin bears the mark of the Crow nation. My poor Carnero, you must put up with it, for though the punishment you received was severe, I am forced to allow that it was deserved."

The red-skin had begun smoking again as quietly as if nothing had occurred.

"The dog will pay me for it with his traitor face," the capataz growled, on hearing his master's warning. "I am no man if I do not leave his body as food for the Crows he discovers so cleverly."

"My poor lad," his master continued, with a jeer, you had better forget this affair, which I allow might be disagreeable to your self-esteem; for I fancy you would not be the gainer by recommencing the quarrel."

The capataz did not answer; he looked round at the spectators to select one on whom he could vent his spite, without incurring any extreme risk; but the peons were on their guard, and offered him no chance. He then, with an air of vexation, made a signal to two men to follow him, and left the circle grumbling.

The head of the cavaran remained for a few minutes plunged in serious thought; he then withdrew beneath his tent, the curtain of which fell behind him; and the peons lay down on the ground, one after the other, with their feet to the fire, and carefully wrapped up in their serapes, and fell asleep.

The Indian then took the pipe-stem from his mouth, looked searchingly around him, shook out the ashes, passed the pipe through his belt, and, rising negligently, went slowly to crouch at the foot of a tree, though not before he had taken the precaution of wrapping himself

in his buffalo robe, a measure which the sharp air rendered, if not indispensable, at any rate necessary.

Ere long, with the exception of the sentries leaning on their guns and motionless as statues, all the travellers were plunged in deep sleep, for the capataz himself, in spite of the promise he had made his master, had laid himself across the entrance of the tent.

An hour elapsed ere any thing disturbed the silence that prevailed in the camp. All at once a singular thing happened. The buffalo robe, under which the Indian was sheltered, gently rose with an almost imperceptible movement, and the red-skin's face appeared, darting glances of fire into the gloom. In a moment the guide raised himself slowly along the trunk of the tree against which he had been lying, embraced it with his feet and hands, and with undulating movements resembling those of reptiles, he left the ground, and raised himself to the first branches, among which he disappeared.

This ascent was executed with such well-calculated slowness that it had not produced the slightest sound. Moreover, the buffalo robe left at the foot of the tree so well retained its primitive folds, that it was impossible to discover, without touching it, that the man it had sheltered had left it.

When the guide was thoroughly concealed among the leaves, he remained for a moment motionless; though not in order to regain his breath after having made such an expenditure of strength, for this man was made of iron, and fatigue had no power over him. But he probably wished to look about him, for with his body bent forward, and his eyes fixed on space, he inhaled the

breeze, and his glances seemed trying to pierce the gloom.

Before selecting as his resting-place the foot of the tree in which he was now concealed, the guide had assured himself that this tree, which was very high and leafy, was joined at about two-thirds of its height by other trees, which gradually rose along the side of the mountain, and formed a wall of verdure.

After a few minutes' hesitation, the guide drew in his belt, placed his knife between his teeth, and with a certainty and lightness of movement which would have done honor to a monkey, he commenced literally hopping from one tree to another, hanging by his arms, and clinging to the creepers, waking up, as he passed, the birds, which flew away in alarm.

This strange journey lasted about three-quarters of an hour. At length the guide stopped, looked attentively around him, and gliding down the trunk of the tree on which he was, reached the ground. The spot where he now found himself was a rather spacious clearing, in the centre of which blazed an enormous fire, serving to warm forty or fifty red-skins, completely armed and equipped for war. Still, singular to say, the majority of these Indians, instead of their long lances and the bows they usually employ, carried muskets of American manufacture, which led to the supposition that they were picked warriors and great braves of their nation; and this too was further proved by the numerous wolf-tails fastened to their heels, a honorable insignia which only renowned warriors have the right to assume.

This detachment of red-skins was certainly on the war-trail, or at any rate on a serious expedition, for they had with them neither dogs nor

squaws. In spite of the slight care with which the Indians are wont to guard themselves at night, the free and deliberate manner in which the guide entered their encampment proved that he was expected by these warriors, who evinced no surprise at seeing him, but, on the contrary, invited him with hospitable gestures to take a seat at their fire. The guide sat down silently, and began smoking the calumet which the chief seated by his side immediately offered him. This chief was still a young man, his marked features displaying the utmost craft and boldness. After a rather lengthened interval, doubtless expressly granted the visitor to let him draw breath and warm himself, the young chief bowed to him and addressed him deferentially.

"My father is welcome among his sons; they were impatiently awaiting his arrival."

The guide responded to this compliment with a grimace, in all probability intended to pass muster for a smile. The chief continued:—

"Our scouts have carefully examined the encampment of the Yoris, and the warriors of the Jester are ready to obey the instructions given them by their great sachem, Eagle-head. Is my father, Curumilla, satisfied with his red children?"

Curumilla (for the guide was no other than the reader's old acquaintance the Araucano chief) laid his right hand on his chest, and uttered with a guttural accent the exclamation, "Ugh!" which was with him a mark of the greatest joy.

The Jester and his warriors had been too long acquainted with Curumilla for his silence to seem strange to them; hence they yielded without repugnance to his mania, and carefully giving up the hope of getting a syllable out of his closed

lips, began with him a conversation in signs.

We have already had occasion, in a previous work, to mention that the red-skins have two languages, the written and the sign language. The latter, which has among them attained a high perfection, and which all understand, is usually employed when hunting, or on expeditions, when a word pronounced even in a low voice may reveal the presence of an ambuscade to the enemy, whether men or beasts, whom they are pursuing, and desire to surprise. It would have been interesting, and even amusing, for any stranger who had been present at this interview to see with what rapidity the gestures and signs were exchanged between these men, so strangely lit up by the ruddy glow of the fire, and who resembled, with their strange movements, their stern faces, and singular attitudes, a council of demons. At times the Jester, with his body bent forward, and emphatic gestures, held a dumb speech, which his comrades followed with the most sustained attention, and which they answered with a rapidity that words themselves could not have surpassed.

At length this silent council terminated. Curumilla raised his hand to heaven, and pointed to the stars, which were beginning to grow dim, and then left the circle. The red-skins respectfully followed him to the foot of the tree by the aid of which he had entered their camp. When he reached it, he turned round.

"May the Wacondah protect my father!" the Jester then said. "His sons have thoroughly understood his instructions, and will follow them literally. The great pale hunter will have joined his friends by this hour, and he is doubtless awaiting us. To-morrow Koutonepi will see

his Comanche brothers. At the *endihá* the camp will be raised."

"It is good," Curumilla answered, and saluting for the last time the warriors, who bowed respectfully before him, the chief seized the creeping plants, and, raising himself by the strength of his wrists, in a second he reached the branches, and disappeared in the foliage.

The journey the Indian had made was very important, and needed to be so for him to run such great risks in order to have an interview at this hour of the night with the red-skins; but as the reader will soon learn what were the consequences of this expedition, we deem it unnecessary to translate the sign-language employed during the council, or explain the resolutions formed between Curumilla and the Jester.

The chief recommenced his aerial trip with the same lightness and the same good fortune. After a lapse of time comparatively much shorter than that which he had previously employed, he reached the camp of the white men. The same silence prevailed in its interior; the sentinels were still motionless at their post, and the watch-fires were beginning to expire.

The chief assured himself that no eye was fixed on him—that no spy was on the watch; and, feeling certain of not being perceived, he slid silently down the tree and resumed the place beneath the buffalo-robe which he was supposed not to have left during the night.

At the moment when, after taking a final glance around, the Indian chief disappeared beneath his robe, the capataz, who was lying athwart the entrance of the hut, gently raised his head, and looked with strange fixity of glance at the place occupied by the red-skin.

Had a suspicion been aroused in

the Mexican's mind? Had he noticed the departure and return of the chief? Presently he let his head fall again, and it would have been impossible to read on his motionless features what were the thoughts that troubled him.

The remainder of the night passed tranquilly and peacefully.

CHAPTER V.

THE FORT OF THE CHICHIMEQUES.

THE sun rose; its beams played on the trembling yellow leaves of the trees, and tinged them with a thousand shades of gold and purple. The birds, cozily nestled in the bushes, struck up their matin carol; the awakening of nature was as splendid and imposing as it is in all mountainous countries.

The leader of the caravan left his tent and gave orders to strike the camp. The tent was at once folded up; the mules were loaded, and, so soon as the horses were saddled, the party started without waiting for the morning meal, for they generally breakfasted at the eleven o'clock halt, while resting to let the great heat of the day subside.

The caravan advanced along the road from Santa Fé to the United States, at a speed unusual under such circumstances. A military system was affected, which was imposing, and, indeed, indispensable in these regions, infested not merely by numerous bands of predatory Indians, but also traversed by the pirates of the prairie, more dangerous bandits still, who were driven by their enemies beyond the pale of the law, and who, ambushed at the

turnings of roads or in broken rocks, attacked the caravans as they passed, and pitilessly massacred the travellers, after plundering them of all they possessed.

About twenty yards ahead of the caravan rode four men, with their rifles on their thighs, preceded by the guide, who formed the extreme vanguard. Next came the main body, composed of six well-armed peons, watching the mules and baggage, under the immediate orders of the chief of the caravan. Lastly, the capataz rode about thirty paces in the rear, having under his orders four resolute men armed to the teeth.

Thus arranged to face any event, the caravan enjoyed a relative security, for it was not very probable that the white or red pillagers, who were doubtless watching it, would dare to attack in open day seventeen resolute and trained men. At night the horse-thieves, who glide silently in the darkness during the sleep of the travellers, and carry off horses and baggage, were more formidable.

Still, either through accident, or the prudential measures employed by the chief of the caravan, since they had left Santa Fé, that is to say for more than a month, the Mexicans had not seen an Indian, or been alarmed. They had journeyed—apparently, at least—with as much tranquillity as if, instead of being in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, they were moving along the roads in the interior of Sonora. This security, however, while augmenting their confidence, had not caused their prudential measures to be neglected; and their chief, whom this unusual leniency on the part of the villains who prowl about these countries alarmed, redoubled his vigilance and precautions to avoid a surprise and a collision with the plunderers.

The discovery, made on the previous day by the guide, of an Indian Crow trail—the most determined thieves in these mountains—added to his apprehensions; for he did not hide from himself that, if he were compelled to fight, in spite of the courage and discipline of his peons, the odds would be against him, when fighting men thoroughly acquainted with the country, and who would only attack him with numbers sufficient to crush his band, however desperate the resistance offered might be.

When he left the camp, the chief of the caravan, suffering perhaps from a gloomy foreboding, spurred his horse and joined the Indian, who, as we said, was marching alone in front, examining the bushes, and apparently performing all the duties of an experienced guide. Curumilla, though he heard the hurried paces of the Mexican's horse, did not turn round, but continued trotting along carelessly on the sorry mule allotted to him for this expedition.

When the chief of the caravan joined him and brought his horse alongside the Indian, instead of speaking to him, he attentively examined him for some minutes, trying to pierce the mask of stoicism spread over the guide's features, and to read his thoughts. But, after a rather lengthened period, the Mexican was constrained to recognize the inutility of his efforts, and to confess to himself the impossibility of guessing the intentions of this man, for whom, in spite of the service he had rendered the caravan, he felt an instinctive aversion, and whom he would like to force, at all risks, to make a frank explanation.

"Indian," he said to him in Spanish, "I wish to speak with you for a few moments on an important subject; so be good enough to put

off your usual silence for a while and answer, like an honest man, the questions I propose asking you."

Curumilla bowed respectfully.

"You engaged with me, at Santa Fé, to lead me, for the sum of four ounces, of which you received one-half in advance—to lead me, I say, safely to the frontiers of Upper Mexico. Since you have been in my service I must allow that I have only had reason to praise the prudence in which you have performed your duties; but we are at this moment in the heart of the Rocky Mountains: that is to say, we have reached the most dangerous part of our long journey. Two days ago you lifted the trail of Crow Indians, very formidable enemies of caravans, and I want to consult with you as to the means to employ to foil the snares in which these Indians will try to catch us, and to know what measures you intend to employ to avoid a meeting with them; in a word, I want to know your plan of action."

The Indian, without replying, felt in a bag of striped calico thrown over his shoulder, and produced a greasy paper, folded in four, which he opened and offered the Mexican.

"What is this?" the latter asked, as he looked and ran through it. "Oh, yes, certainly; your engagement. Well, what connection has this with the question I asked you?"

Curumilla, still impassive, laid his finger on the paper, at the last paragraph of the engagement.

"Well, what then?" the Mexican exclaimed, ill-humoredly. "It is said there, it is true, that I must trust entirely to you, and leave you at liberty to act as you please for the common welfare, without questioning you."

The Indian nodded his head in assent.

"Well, *voto à Brios!*" the Mexican shouted, irritated by this studied coolness, in spite of his resolve to curb his temper, and annoyed at the man's obstinate refusal to answer, "what proves to me that you are acting for our common welfare, and that you are not a traitor?"

At this word traitor, so distinctly uttered by the Mexican, Curumilla gave a tiger glance at the speaker, while his whole body was agitated by a convulsive tremor: he uttered two or three incomprehensible guttural exclamations, and ere the Mexican could suspect his intentions, he was seized round the waist, lifted from the saddle, and hurled on the ground, where he lay stunned.

Curumilla leaped from his mule, drew from his belt two gold ounces, hurled them at the Mexican, and then, bounding over the precipice that bordered the road, glided to the bottom with headlong speed and disappeared at once.

What we have described occurred so rapidly that the peons who remained behind, although they hurried up at full speed to their master's assistance, arrived too late on the scene to prevent the Indian's flight.

The Mexican had received no wound; the surprise and violence of the fall had alone caused his momentary stupor; but almost immediately he regained his senses, and comprehending the inutility and folly of pursuit at such a spot with such an adversary, he devoured his shame and passion, and, remounting his horse, which had been stopped, he coolly gave orders to continue the journey, with an internal resolution that, if ever the opportunity offered, he would have an exemplary revenge for the insult he had received.

For the moment he could not

think of it, for more serious interests demanded all his attention; it was evident to him that, in branding the guide as a traitor, he had struck home, and that the latter, furious at seeing himself unmasked, had proceeded to such extremities in order to escape punishment, and find means to fly safely.

The situation was becoming most critical for the chief of the caravan; he found himself abandoned and left without a guide, in unknown regions, doubtless watched by hidden foes, and exposed at any moment to an attack, whose result could but be unfavorable to himself and his people; hence he must form a vigorous resolve in order to escape, were it possible, the misfortunes that menaced the caravan.

The Mexican was a man endowed with an energetic organization, brave to rashness, whom no peril, however great it might be, had ever yet had the power to make him blench; in a few seconds he calculated all the favorable chances left him, and his determination was formed. The road he was following at this moment was assuredly the one frequented by the caravans proceeding from the United States to California or Mexico; and there was no other road but this in the mountains. Hence the Mexican resolved to form an entrenched camp, at the spot that might appear to him most favorable, fortify himself there as well as he could, and await the passing of the first caravan, which he would join.

This plan was exceedingly simple, and in addition very easy to execute. As the travellers possessed an ample stock of provisions and ammunition, they had no reason to fear scarcity, while, on the other hand, seven or eight days in all probability would not elapse without

the appearance of a fresh caravan; and the Mexican believed himself capable of resisting, behind good entrenchments, with his fifteen peons, any white or red plunderers who dared to attack him.

So soon as this resolution was formed, the Mexican at once prepared to carry it out. After having briefly and in a few words explained to his disheartened peons what his intentions were, and recommending them to redouble their prudence, he left them, and pushed on in order to reconnoitre the ground and select the most suitable spot for the establishment of the camp.

He started his horse at a gallop and soon disappeared in the windings of the road, but, through fear of a sudden attack, he held his gun in his hand, and his glances were constantly directed around him, examining with the utmost care the thick chapparal which bordered the road on the side of the mountain.

The Mexican went on thus for about two hours, noticing that the further he proceeded the narrower and more abrupt the track became. Suddenly it widened out in front of him, and he arrived at an esplanade, across which the road ran, and which was no other than the Fort of the Chichimèques, previously described by us.

The Mexican's practised eye at once seized the advantages of such a position, and, without loss of time in examining it in detail, he turned back to rejoin the caravan. The travellers, though marching much more slowly than their chief, had, however, pushed on, so that he rejoined them about three-quarters of an hour after the discovery of the terrace.

The flight of the guide had nearly demoralized the Mexicans, more accustomed to the ease of tropical re-

gions, and whose courage the snows of the Rocky Mountains had already weakened, if not destroyed. Fortunately for the chief's plans he had over his servants that influence which clever minds know how to impose on ordinary natures, and the peons, on seeing their master gay and careless about the future, began to hope that they would escape better than they had supposed from the unlucky position in which they found themselves so suddenly placed. The march was continued tranquilly; no suspicious sign was discovered, and the Mexicans were justified in believing that, with the exception of the time they would be compelled to lose in awaiting a new guide, the flight of the Indian would entail no disagreeable consequences on them.

Singularly enough, Carnero the capataz seemed rather pleased than annoyed at the sudden disappearance of the guide. Far from complaining or deplored the delay in the continuance of the journey he laughed at what had happened, and made an infinitude of more or less witty jests about it, which in the end considerably annoyed his master, whose joy was merely on the surface, and who, in his heart, cursed the mishap which kept them in the mountains, and exposed him to the insults of the plunderers.

"Pray, what do you find so agreeable in what has happened that you are or affect to be so merry, No Carnero?" he at length asked with considerable ill-temper.

"Forgive me, *mi amo*," the capataz answered humbly; "but you know the proverb, 'What can't be cured must be endured,' and consequently I forgot."

"Hum!" said the master, without any other reply.

"And besides," the capataz added,

as he stooped down to the chief, and almost whispering, "however bad our position may be, is it not better to pretend to consider it good?"

His master gave him a piercing look, but the other continued imperturbably with an obsequious smile—

"The duty of a devoted servant, *mi amo*, is to be always of his master's opinion, whatever may happen. The peons were murmuring this morning after your departure, and you know what the character of these brutes is; if they feel alarmed we shall be lost, for it will be impossible for us to get out of our position; hence I thought that I was carrying out your views by attempting to cheer them up, and I feign a gayety which, be assured, I do not feel, under the supposition that it would be agreeable to you."

The Mexican shook his head dubiously, but the observations of the capataz were so just, the reasons he offered appeared so plausible, that he was constrained to yield and thank him, as he did not care to alienate at this moment a man who by a word could change the temper of his peons, and urge them to revolt instead of adhering to their duty.

"I thank you, No Carnero," he said, with a conciliatory air. "You perfectly understood my intentions. I am pleased with your devotion to my person, and the moment will soon arrive, I hope, when it will be in my power to prove to you the value I attach to you."

"The certainty of having done my duty, now as ever, is the sole reward I desire, *mi amo*," the capataz answered, with a respectful bow.

The Mexican gave him a side glance, but he restrained himself, and it was with a smile that he thanked the capataz for the second

time. The latter thought it prudent to break off the interview here, and, stopping his horse, he allowed his master to pass him. The chief of the caravan was one of those unhappily constituted men who after having passed their life in deceiving or trying to deceive those with whom the accidents of an adventurous existence have brought them into contact, had reached that point when he had no confidence in any one, and sought, behind the most frivolous words, to discover an interested motive, which most frequently did not exist. Although his capataz Carnero had been for a long time in his service, and he granted him a certain amount of familiarity — although he appeared to place great confidence in him, and count on his devotion, still in his heart, he not only suspected him, but felt almost confident, without any positive proof, it is true, that he was playing a double game with him, and was a secret agent of his deceivers.

What truth there might be in this supposition, which held a firm hold of the Mexican's mind, we are unable to say at present; but the slightest actions of his capataz were watched by him, and he felt certain that he should, sooner or later, attain a confirmation of his doubts; hence, while feigning the greatest satisfaction with him, he constantly kept on his guard, ready to deal a blow, which would be the sharper because it had been so long prepared.

A little before eleven A.M. the caravan reached the terrace, and it was with a feeling of joy, which they did not attempt to conceal, that the peons recognized the strength of the position selected by their master for the encampment.

"We shall stop here for the

present," the Mexican said. "Unload the mules, and light the fires. Immediately after breakfast we will begin intrenching ourselves in such a way as to foil all the assaults of marauders."

The peons obeyed with the speed of men who have made a long journey and are beginning to feel hungry; the fires were lighted in an instant, and a few moments later the peons vigorously attacked their maize tortillas, their tocina, and their cecina — those indispensable elements of every Mexican meal. When the hunger of his men was appeased, and they had smoked their cigarettes, the chief rose.

"Now," he said, "to work."

CHAPTER VI.

THE SURPRISE.

THE position which the leader of the caravan fancied he had been the first to discover, and where he had made up his mind to halt, was admirably selected to establish an intrenched camp — strong enough to resist for months the attacks of the Indians and the pirates of the prairies. The immense voladero hovering at a prodigious height above the precipices, and guarded on the right and left by enormous masses of rock, offered such conditions of security that the peons regained all their merry carelessness, and only regarded the mysterious flight of the guide as an accident of no real importance, and which would have no other consequences for them but to make their journey somewhat longer than the time originally arranged.

It was, hence, with well promising ardor that they rose on receiving their chief's command, and prepared under his directions to dig the trench which was intended to protect them from a surprise. This trench was to be bordered by a line of tall stakes, running across the open space between the rocks, which gave the sole access to the terrace.

The head-quarters were first prepared, that is to say, the tent was raised, and the horses hobbled near piequets driven into the ground.

At the moment when the leader proceeded with several peons armed with picks and spades toward the entrance, with the probable intention of marking the exact spot where the trench was to be dug, the capataz approached him obsequiously, and said with a respectful bow—

"Mi amo, I have an important communication to make to you."

His master turned and looked at him with ill-concealed distrust.

"An important communication to make to me?" he repeated.

"Yes, mi amo," the capataz replied with a bow.

"What is it? Speak, but be brief, Carnero, for, as you see, I have no time to lose."

"I hope to gain your time, excellency," the capataz said with a silent smile.

"Ah, ah, what is it?"

"If you will allow me to say two words aside, excellency, you will know at once."

"Diablo! a mystery, Master Carnero?"

"Mi amo, it is my duty to inform no one but your excellency of my discovery."

"Hum! then you have discovered something?"

The other bowed, but made no further answer.

"Very well then," his master continued, "come this way: go on, muchachos," he added, addressing the peons, "I will rejoin you in a moment."

The latter went on, while the leader retired for a few paces, followed by the capataz. When he considered that he had placed a sufficient distance between himself and the ears of his people, he addressed the half-breed again—

"Now, I suppose, Master Carnero," he said, "you will see no inconvenience in explaining yourself?"

"None at all, excellency."

"Speak then, in the fiend's name, and keep me no longer in suspense."

"This is the affair, excellency: I have discovered a grotto."

"What?" his master exclaimed, in surprise, "you have discovered a grotto?"

"Yes, excellency."

"Where?"

"Here."

"Here! that's impossible."

"It's the fact, excellency."

"But where?"

"There," he said, stretching out his arm, "behind that mass of rocks."

A suspicious look flashed from beneath his master's eyelashes.

"Ah!" he muttered, "that is very singular, Master Carnero; may I ask in what manner you discovered this grotto, and what motive was so imperious as to take you among those rocks, when you were aware how indispensable your presence was elsewhere?"

The capataz was not affected by the tone in which these words were uttered; he answered calmly, as if he did not perceive the menace they contained—

"Oh! mi amo, the discovery was quite accidental, I assure you."

"I do not believe in chance," his master answered; "but go on."

"When we had finished breakfast," the capataz continued, soothingly, "I perceived, on rising, that several horses, mine among them, had become unfastened, and were straying in different directions."

"That is true," his master muttered, apparently answering his own thoughts rather than the remarks of the capataz.

The latter gave an almost imperceptible smile. "Fearing," he continued, "lest the horses might be lost, I immediately started in pursuit. They were easy to catch, with the exception of one, which rambled among the rocks, and I was obliged to follow it."

"I understand; and so it led you to the mouth of the grotto."

"Exactly, mi amo; I found it standing at the very entrance, and had no difficulty in seizing the bridle."

"That is indeed most singular. And did you enter the grotto, Master Carnero?"

"No, mi amo. I thought it my duty to tell you of it first."

"You were right. Well, we will enter it together. Fetch us some torches of ocote wood, and show us the way. By the by, do not forget to bring weapons, for we know not what men or beasts we may find in caverns thus opening on a high road." This he said with a sarcastic air, which caused the capataz to tremble inwardly in spite of his determined indifference.

While he executed his master's orders, the latter selected six of his peons, on whose courage he thought he could most rely, ordered them to take their muskets, and bidding the others to keep a good watch, but not begin any thing till he returned, he made a signal to the capataz that he

was ready to follow him. No Carnero had followed with an evil eye the arrangements made by his master, but probably did not deem it prudent to risk any remark, for he silently bowed his head, and walked towards the pile of rocks that masked the entrance of the grotto.

These granite blocks, piled one on top of the other, did not appear, however, to have been brought there by accident, but, on the contrary, they appeared to have belonged in some early and remote age to a clumsy but substantial edifice, which was probably connected with the breastwork still visible on the edge of the voladero on the side of the precipice.

The Mexicans crossed the rocks without difficulty, and soon found themselves before the dark and frowning entrance of the cavern. The chief gave his peons a signal to halt.

"It would not be prudent," he said, "to venture without precautions into this cavern. Prepare your arms, muchachos, and keep your eyes open; at the slightest suspicious sound, or the smallest object that appears, fire. Capataz, light the torches."

The latter obeyed without a word; the leader of the caravan assured himself at a glance that his orders had been properly carried out; then taking his pistols from his belt, he cocked them, took one in each hand, and said to Carnero—

"Take the lead," he said, with a mocking accent; "it is only just that you should do the honors of this place which you so unexpectedly discovered. Forward, you others, and be on your guard," he added, turning to the peons.

The eight men then went into the cavern at the heels of the capataz, who raised the torches above his

capataz, they led him, as well as the peons and the prisoners of the second caravan, in front of the tribunal, where they ranged themselves in line. Then, at a signal from the Jester, the horsemen closed up round the white men, who were thus hemmed in by Comanche warriors.

The spectacle offered by this assemblage of men, with their marked features and quaint garb, grouped without any apparent regularity on this voladero, which was suspended as if artificially over a terrible gulf, and leant against lofty mountains, with their abrupt flanks and snowy crest, was not without a certain grandeur.

A deadly silence brooded at this moment over the esplanade; all chests were heaving, every heart was oppressed. Red-skins, hunters, and Mexicans all understood instinctively that a grand drama was about to be performed; invisible streams could be heard hoarsely murmuring in the cavern, and at times a gust of wind whistled over the heads of the horsemen.

The prisoners, affected by a vague and undefined terror, waited with secret anxiety, not knowing what fate these ferocious victors reserved for them, but certain that, whatever the decision formed about them might be, prayers would be impotent to move them, and that they would have to endure the atrocious torture to which they would doubtless be condemned.

The president looked around the assembly, rose in the midst of a profound silence, stretched out his arm toward the general, who stood cold and passionless before him, and, after darting at him a withering glance through the holes made in the crape that concealed his face, he

said in a grave, stern, and impressive voice—

“Caballeros, remember the words you are about to hear, listen to them attentively, so as to understand them, and not to be in error as to our intentions. In the first place, in order to reassure you and restore your entire freedom of mind, learn that you have not fallen into the hands of Indians thirsting for your blood, or of pirates who intend to plunder you first and assassinate you afterwards. No, you need not feel the slightest alarm. When you have acted as impartial witnesses, and are able to render testimony of what you have seen, should it be required, you will be at liberty to continue your journey, without the forfeiture of a single article. The men seated on my right and left, although masked, are brave and honest hunters. The day may perhaps arrive when you will know them; but reasons, whose importance you will speedily recognize, compel them to remain unknown for the present. I was bound to say this, senores, to you against whom we bear no animosity, before coming to a final settlement with this man.”

One of the travellers belonging to the second caravan stepped forward; he was a young man, with elegant and noble features, tall and well-built.

“Caballero,” he answered, in a distinct and sympathizing voice, “I thank you, in the name of my companions and myself, for the reassuring words you have spoken. I know how implacable the laws of the desert are, and have ever submitted to them without a murmur; but permit me to ask you one question.”

“Speak, caballero.”

"Is it an act of vengeance or justice you are about to carry out?"

"Neither, senor. It would be an act of folly or weakness if the inspirations of the heart could be blamed or doubted by honorable and loyal men."

"Enough of this, senor," the general said, haughtily; "and if you are as you assert, an honorable man, show me your face, in order that I may know with whom I have to deal."

The president shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"No, Don Sebastian," he said, "for in that case the game would not be even between us. But be patient, caballero, and soon you will learn, if not who I am, at any rate the motives which have made me your implacable foe."

The general attempted to smile, but in spite of himself the smile died away on his lips, and though his haughty bearing seemed to defy his unknown enemies, a secret apprehension contracted his heart.

There was a silence for some moments, during which no other sound was audible save that of the breeze whistling through the denuded branches and the distant murmur of the invisible torrents in the guebrades.

The president looked round with flashing eyes, and folding his arms on his chest at the same time, as he raised his head, he began speaking again in a sharp, cutting voice, whose accents caused his hearers to tremble involuntarily. And yet they were brave men, accustomed to the terrible incidents of a desert-life, and whom the most serious dangers could not have affected.

"Now listen, senores," he said, "and judge this man impartially; but do not judge him according to prairie law, but in your

hearts. General Don Sebastian Guerero, who is standing so bold and upright before you at this moment, is one of the greatest noblemen of Mexico, a *Christiano viejo* of the purest blood, descended in a direct line from the Spanish Conquistadors. His fortune is immense, incalculable, and he himself could not determine its amount. This man, by the mere strength of his will, and the implacable egotism that forms the basis of his character, has always succeeded in every thing he has undertaken. Coldly and resolutely ambitious, he has covered with corpses the bloody road he was compelled to follow in order to attain his proposed object, and he has done so without hesitation or remorse; he has looked on with a smiling face, when his dearest friends and his nearest relations fell by his side; for him nothing which men respect exists—faith and honor are with him but empty sounds. He had a daughter, who was the perfection of women, and he coldly lacerated that daughter's heart; he fatally drove her to suicide, and the blood of the poor girl spouted on his forehead, while he was triumphantly witnessing the legal murder of the man she loved, and whose death he resolved on, because he refused to palter with his honor, and aid this man in the infamous treachery he was meditating. This human-faced tiger, this monster with the mocking, sceptical face, you see, senores, has only one thought; one object, one desire—it is, to attain the highest rank, even if, to effect it, he were compelled to clamber over the panting corpses of his relations and friends sacrificed to his ambition; and if he cannot carve out an independent kingdom in this collapsing republic, which is called Mexico, he wishes to seize, at least, on the

supreme magistracy, and be elected president. If this man's life merely comprised this egotistic ambition and these infamous schemes to satisfy it, I should content myself with despising, instead of hating him, and not being able to find an excuse for him, I should forget him. But no; this man has done more—he dared to lay hands on a man who was my friend, my brother, the Count de Prébois Crancé, to whom I have already referred, senores, without mentioning his name. Unable to conquer the count loyally, despairing of winning him over to his shameful cause, he at first tried to poison him; but, not having succeeded, and wishing to come to an end, he forgot that his daughter, an angel, the sole creature who loved him, and implored divine mercy for him, was the betrothed wife of the count, and that killing him would be her condemnation to death. In his horrible thirst for revenge, he ordered the judicial murder of my friend, and coldly presided at the execution, not noticing, in the joyous deliverance of his satisfied hatred, that his daughter had killed herself at his side, and that he was trampling her corpse beneath his horse's feet. Such is what this man has done; look at him well, in order to recognize him hereafter; he is General Don Sebastian Guerrero, military governor of Sonora."

"Oh!" the audience said involuntarily, as they instinctively recoiled in horror.

"If this man is the ex-governor of Sonora," the hunter who had already spoken said, in disgust, "he is a wild beast, whom his ferocity has placed beyond the pale of society, and it is the duty of honest men to destroy him."

"He must die! he must die!" the new-comers exclaimed.

The general's peons were gloomy and downcast; they hung their heads sadly, for they did not dare attempt to defend their master, and yet did not like to accuse him.

The general was still cool and unmoved; he was apparently calm, but a fearful tempest was raging in his heart. His face was of an earthly and cadaverous pallor; his brows were contracted till they touched, and his violet lips were closed, as if he were making violent efforts not to utter a word, and to restrain his fury from breaking out in insults. His eyes flashed fire, and then his whole body was agitated by convulsive movements; but he managed, through his self-command, to conquer his emotion, and retain the expression of withering contempt which he had assumed since the beginning of this scene.

Seeing that his accuser was silent, he took a step forward, and stretched out his arm, as if he claimed the right of answering. But his enemy gave him no time to utter a word.

"Wait!" he shouted, "I have not said all yet; now that I have revealed what you have done, I am bound to render the persons here present judges not only of what I have done, but also of what I intend to do in future against you."



CHAPTER VIII.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

THE general shrugged his shoulders with a contemptuous smile.

"Nonsense," he said, "you are

mad, my fine fellow. I know now who you are; your hatred of me has unconsciously discovered you. Remove that veil which is no longer of any use; I know you, for, as you are aware, hatred is clear-sighted. You are the French hunter whom I have constantly met in my path to impede my projects, or overthrow my plans."

"Add," the hunter interrupted, "and whom you will ever meet."

"Be it so, unless I crush you beneath my heel like a noxious insect."

"Ever so proud and so indomitable, do you not fear lest, exasperated by your insults, I may forget the oath I have taken, and sacrifice you to my vengeance?"

"Nonsense," he replied, with a disdainful toss of his head, "you kill me? that is impossible, for you are too anxious to enjoy your revenge to stab me in a moment of passion."

"That is true, this time you are right, Don Sebastian. I will not kill you, because, however culpable you may be, I do not recognize the right to do so. Blood does not wash out blood, it only increases the stain; and I intend to take a more protracted vengeance on you than a stab or a shot will grant us. Besides this, vengeance has already commenced."

"Indeed!" the general said sarcastically.

"Still," the hunter continued with some emotion, "as the vengeance must be straightforward, I wish to give you, in the presence of all these gentlemen, the proof that I fear you no more to-day than I did when the struggle commenced between us. This veil which you reproach me for wearing I am going to remove, not because you have recognized me, but because I deem it unworthy

of me to conceal my features from you any longer. Brothers," he added, turning to his silent assistants, "my mask alone must fall, retain yours, for it is important for my plans of vengeance that you should remain unknown."

The four men bowed their assent, and the hunter threw away the crape that covered his features.

"Valentine Guillois!" the general exclaimed; "I was sure of it."

On hearing this celebrated name, the hunters of the second caravan made a movement as if to rush forward, impelled either by curiosity or some other motive.

"Stay," the Frenchman shouted, stopping them by a quick wave of the hand, "let me finish with this man first."

They fell back with a bow.

"Now," he continued, "we are really face to face. Well, listen patiently to what still remains for me to tell you; and, perhaps, the assumed calmness spread over your features will melt away before my words, like the snow in the sunshine."

"I will listen to you, because it is impossible for me to do otherwise at this moment; but if you flatter yourself that you will affect me in any way, I am bound to warn you that you will not succeed. The hatred I feel for you is so thoroughly balanced by the contempt you inspire me with, that nothing which emanates from you can move me in the slightest degree."

"Listen then," the hunter coldly continued; "when my unhappy friend fell at Guaymas, in my paroxysm of grief I allow that I intended to kill you; but reflection soon came, and I saw that it would be better to let you live. Thanks to me, one week after the count's death, the Mexican Government,

not satisfied with disavowing your conduct publicly, deprived you of your command, without inquiry, and refused, in spite of your remonstrances, to explain to you the motives of their conduct."

"Ah, ah," the general said, in a hissing but suppressed voice, "it was to you, then, that I owe my recall?"

"Yes, general, to me alone."

"I am delighted to hear it."

"You remained, then, in Sonora, without power or influence, hated and despised by all, and marked on your forehead with that indelible brand which God imprinted on Cain, the first murderer; but Mexico is a blessed country, where ambitious men can easily fish in troubled waters, when, like yourself, they are not restrained by any of those bonds of honor, which too often fetter the genius of honest men. You could not remain long bowed beneath the blow that had fallen on you, and you made up your mind in a few days. You resolved to leave Sonora and proceed to Mexico, where, thanks to your colossal fortune, and the influence it would necessarily give you, you could carry on your ambitious projects; by changing the scene, you hoped to cast the scandalous acts of which you had been guilty into oblivion. Your preparations were soon made—listen attentively, general, to this, for I assure you that I have reached the most interesting part of my narration."

"Go on, go on, senor," he replied carelessly, "I am listening to you attentively; do not fear that I shall forget one of your words."

"In spite of your affected indifference, senor, I will go on. As you fancied, for certain reasons which it is unnecessary to remind you of, that your enemies might try to lay some

ambush for you during the long journey you were obliged to perform from Hermosillo to Mexico, you thought it necessary to take the following precautions, the inutility of some of which I presume that you have recognized by this time. While, for the purpose of deceiving your enemies, you started in disguise, and only accompanied by a few men, for California, in order to return to Mexico across the Rocky Mountains; while you gave questioners the fullest details of the road, you pretended to follow, with your men—your real object was quite different. The man in whom you placed your confidence, Don Isidro Vargas, a veteran of your War of Independence, who had known you when a child, and whom you had converted into your tool, took the shortest, and, consequently, most direct route for the capital, having with him not only twelve mules loaded with gold and silver, the fruit of your plunder during the period of your command, but a more precious article still, the body of your unhappy daughter, which you had embalmed, and which the captain had orders to inter with your ancestors at your Hacienda del Palmar, which you left so long ago, and to which you will, in all probability, never return. Your object in acting thus was not only to divert attention from your ill-gotten riches, but also to attract your enemies after yourself. Unfortunately or fortunately, according as we regard the matter, I am an old hunter so difficult to deceive that my comrades gave me long ago the glorious title of the Trail-hunter, and hence, while everybody else was forming speculations about you, I alone was not deceived, and guessed your plan."

"Still, your presence here gives a striking denial to the assertion,"

the general interrupted him, ironically.

"You think so, *senor*, and that proves that you are not thoroughly acquainted with me yet; but patience, I hope that you will, ere long, appreciate me better. Moreover, you have not reflected on the time that has elapsed since your departure from Hermosillo."

"What do you mean?" the general asked, with a sudden start of apprehension.

"I mean that before attacking you, I resolved to settle matters first with the captain."

"Ah!"

"Well, general, it is my painful duty to inform you that four days after he left Pitic, our brave friend Don Isidro, although an old and experienced soldier, well versed in war stratagems, fell into an ambuscade resembling the one into which you fell to-day, with this exception——"

"What exception?" the general asked, with greater interest than he would have liked to display, for he was beginning to fear a catastrophe.

"My men were so imprudent," the hunter continued, ironically, "as to leave the captain the means of defending himself. The result was that he died, bravely fighting to save the gold you had intrusted to him, and, before all, the coffin containing your daughter's corpse."

"Well, and I presume you plundered the caravan, and carried off the gold and silver?" he asked, contemptuously.

"You would most probably have acted thus under similar circumstances, Don Sebastian," the hunter answered, giving him back insult for insult; "but I thought it my duty to act differently. What could you expect? I, a coarse, uneducated hunter, do not know how to

plunder, for I did not learn it when I had the honor to serve my own country, and I never stood under your orders in Mexico. This is what I did: so soon as the captain and the peons he commanded were killed—for the poor devils, I must do them the justice of saying, offered a desperate resistance—I myself, you understand, friend, I myself conveyed the money to your Hacienda del Palmar, where it now remains in safety, as you can easily assure yourself if you ever return to Palmar."

The general breathed again, and smiled ironically. "Instead of blaming you, *senor*," he said, "I, on the contrary, owe you thanks for this chivalrous conduct, especially toward an enemy."

"Do not be in such a hurry to thank me, caballero," the hunter answered; "I have not told you all yet."

These words were uttered with such an accent of gratified hatred, that all the hearers, the general included, shuddered involuntarily, for they understood that the hunter was about to make a terrible revelation, and that the calmness he feigned concealed a tempest.

"Ah," Don Sebastian murmured, "speak, I implore you, *senor*, for I am anxious to know all the obligations I owe you."

"Captain Don Isidro Vargas not only escorted the money I had conveyed to Palmar," he said in a sharp, quick voice, "but there was also a coffin. Well, general, why do you not ask me what has become of that coffin?"

An electric shock ran through the audience on hearing the ironical question so coldly asked by the hunter, whose eye, implacably fixed on the general, seemed to flash fire.

"What!" Don Sebastian ex-

claimed, "I can hardly think that you have committed sacrilege?"

Valentine burst into a loud and sharp laugh. "Your suppositions ever go beyond the object. I commit sacrilege, oh, no! I loved the poor girl too dearly when alive to outrage her after death. No, no—the betrothed of my friend is sacred to me; but as, in my opinion, the assassin can have no claim to the body of his victim, and you are morally your daughter's murderer, I have robbed you of this body, which you are not worthy to have, and which must rest by the side of him for whom she died."

There was a moment's silence. The general's face, hitherto pale, assumed a greenish hue, and his eyes were suffused with blood. Now and then he made superhuman efforts to speak, which were unsuccessful, but at length he yelled in a hoarse and hissing voice—

"It is not true; you have not done this. You cannot have dared to rob a father of his child's body."

"I have done it, I tell you," the hunter said coldly. "I have taken possession of the body of your victim, and now you understand me; never shall you know where this poor body rests. But this is only the beginning of my vengeance. What I wish to kill in you is the soul and not the body; and now be gone. Go and forget at Mexico, amid your ambitious intrigues, the scene that has passed between us; but remember that you will find me in your path everywhere and ever. Farewell till we meet again."

"One last word," the general exclaimed, affected by the deepest despair, "restore me my daughter's body; she was the only human creature I ever loved."

The hunter regarded him for a moment with an undefinable expres-

sion, and then said in a harsh and coldly-mocking voice, "Never."

Then, turning away, he re-entered the grotto, followed by his assistants. The general tried to rush after him, but the Indians restrained him, and, in spite of his resistance, compelled him to stop.

Don Sebastian, who was the more overwhelmed by this last blow because it was unexpected, stood for a moment like a man struck by lightning, with pendant arms and seared eyes. At last a heart-rending sob burst from his bosom, two burning tears sprung from his eyes, and he rolled like a corpse on the ground.

The very Indians, those rough warriors to whom pity is a thing unknown, felt moved by this frightful despair, and several of them turned away not to witness it.

In the meanwhile the Jester had ordered the peons to saddle the horses and load the mules. The general was placed by two servants on a horse, without appearing to notice what was done to him, and a few minutes later the caravan left the Fort of the Chichimèques, and passed unimpeded through the silent ranks of the Indians, who bowed as it passed.

When the Mexicans had disappeared in the windings of the road, Valentine emerged from the grotto, and walked courteously up to the hunters of the second caravan.

"Forgive me," he said to them, "not the delay I have occasioned you, but the involuntary alarm I caused you; but I was compelled to act as I did. You are going to Mexico, where I shall soon be myself, and it is possible that I may require your testimony some day."

"A testimony which will not be refused, my dear countryman," the hunter who had hitherto spoken gracefully answered.

"What!" the hunter exclaimed in amazement, "are you French?"

"Yes, and all my companions are so too. We have come from San Francisco, where, thanks to Providence, we have amassed a very considerable fortune, which we hope to double in the Mexican capital. My name is Antoine Rallier, and these are my brothers, Edward and Augustus; the two ladies who accompany us are my mother and sister, and if you know nobody in Mexico, come straight to me, sir, and you will be received, not only as a friend, but as a brother."

The hunter pressed the hand his countryman offered him.

"As this is the case," he said, "I will not let you go alone, for these mountains are infested by bandits of every description, whom you may not escape, but with my protection you can pass anywhere."

"I heartily accept the offer; but why do you not come with us to Mexico?"

"That is impossible for the present," the hunter answered pensively; "but be at your ease. I shall not fail to demand the fulfilment of your promise."

"You will be welcome, friend, for we have been acquainted for a long time, and we know that you have ever honorably represented France in America."

Two hours later the Fort of the Chichimèques had returned to its usual solitude; white men and Indians had abandoned it forever.

CHAPTER IX.

MEXICO.

WE will now leap over about two months and, leaving the Rocky Mountains, invite the reader to accompany us to the heart of Mexico

The Spanish Conquistadors selected with admirable tact the sites on which they founded the cities destined to insure their power, and become at a later date the centres of their immense trade, and the entrepôts of their incalculable wealth.

Even at the present day, although owing to the negligence of the creoles and their continual fratricidal wars combined with the sudden earthquakes, these cities are half ruined, and the life which the powerful Spanish organization caused to circulate in them has died out, these cities are still a subject of surprise to the traveller accustomed to the morbid crowding of old European cities. He regards with awe these vast squares, surrounded by cloister-like arcades; these broad and regular streets through which refreshing waters continually flow; these shady gardens in which thousands of gayly-plumaged birds twitter; these bold bridges; these majestically simple buildings, whose interiors contain incalculable wealth. And yet, we repeat, the majority of these cities are only the shadow of themselves. They seem dead, and are only aroused by the furious yells of an insurrection, to lead for a few days a feverish existence under the excitement of political passions. But so soon as the corpses are removed, and water has washed away the blood stains, the streets revert to their solitude, the inhabitants hide themselves in their carefully-closed houses, and all become again gloomy, mournful, and silent.

only to be galvanized afresh by the hoarse murmurs of an approaching revolt.

If we except Lima, the splendid "Ciudad de los Reyes," Mexico is probably the largest and handsomest of all the cities that cover the soil of ancient Spanish America.

From whatever point we regard it, Mexico affords a magnificent view; but if you wish to enjoy a really fairy-like sight, ascend at sunset one of the towers of the cathedral, whence you will see the strangest and most picturesque panorama imaginable unrolled at your feet.

Mexico certainly existed before the discovery of America, and our readers will probably pardon a digression showing how the foundation of the city is narrated by old chroniclers.

In the year of the death of Huetzin, King of Tezcuco, that is to say, "the spot where people stop," because it was at this very place that the migration of the Chichimèques terminated, the Mexicans made an eruption into the country, and reached the place where Mexico now stands, at the beginning of the year 1140 of our era. This place then formed part of the dominions of Aculhua, Lord of Atzcaputzalco.

According to paintings and the old chronicles, these Indians came from the empires of the province of Xalisco. It appears that they were of the same race as the Toltecs, and of the family of the noble Huetzin, who with his children and servants escaped during the destruction of the Toltecs, and was residing at that period at Chapultepec, which was also destroyed at a later date.

It is recorded that he traversed with them the country of Michoacan, and took refuge in the province of Atzlan, where he died, and had

for his successors Ozolopan, his son, and Aztlatl, his grandson, whose heir was Ozolopan II. The latter, remembering the country of his ancestors, resolved to return thither with his entire nation, which was already called Mezitin. After many adventures and combats, they at length reached the banks of a great lake covered with an infinitude of islands, and as the recollection of their country had been traditionally kept up among them, they at once recognized it, though not one of them had ever seen it before. Too weak to resist the people that surrounded them, or to establish themselves in the open country, they founded on several of the islands, which they connected together, a town, which they called after themselves, Mexico, and which at a later date was destined to be the capital of a powerful empire.

Although the Mexicans arrived on the banks of the lake in 1140, it was not till two years later that the American Venice began to emerge from the bosom of the waters.

We have dwelt on these details in order to correct an error made by a modern author, who attributes to the Aztecs the foundation of this city, to which he gives the name of Tenochtitlan, instead of Temixtitlan, which is the correct name.*

* In order to protect themselves from the misfortunes which had before crushed them, the Mexicans placed themselves under the safeguard of the King of Azcaputzalco, on whose lands they had established themselves. This prince gave them two of his sons as governors, of whom the first was Acamapuhtli, chief of the Tenucians. On their arrival in Ahanec, these Indians had found on the summit of a rock a nopal, in which was an eagle devouring a serpent, and they took their name from it. Acamapuhtli selected this emblem as the *totem* of the race he was called upon to govern. During the War of Independence, the insurgents adopted this hieroglyphic as the arms of the Mexican Republic, in memory of the ancient and glorious origin of which it reminded them.

Like Venice, its European sister, Mexico was only a collection of cabins, offering a precarious shelter to wretched fishermen; who were incessantly kept in a state of alarm by the attacks of their neighbors. The Mexicans, at first scattered over a great number of small islands, felt the necessity of collecting together in order to offer a better resistance. By their patience and courage they succeeded in building houses, raised on piles, and employing the mud of the lagoons, held together by branches of trees, they created the *chinampas*, or floating gardens, the most curious in the world, on which they sowed vegetables, pimento, and maize, and thus, with the aquatic birds they managed to catch on the lake, they contrived to be entirely independent of their neighbors.

Almost destroyed during the obstinate fights between the natives and the Spaniards, Mexico, four years after the conquest, was entirely rebuilt by Fernando Cortez. But the new city in no way resembled the old one. Most of the canals were filled up, and paved over; magnificent palaces and sumptuous monasteries rose as if by enchantment, and the city became entirely Spanish.

Mexico has been so frequently described by more practised pens than ours, and we, in previous works, have had such frequent occasions to allude to it, that we will not attempt any description here, but continue our story without further delay.

It was October 12th, 1854, two months, day for day, had elapsed since the unfortunate Count de Prébois Crancé, victim of an iniquitous sentence, had honorably fallen at Guaymas beneath the Mexican bullets.* A thick fog had hung

over the city for the whole day, changing at times into a fine drizzle, which after sunset became sharper, although a heavy fog still prevailed. However, at about eight in the evening the rain ceased to fall, and the stagnant waters of the lake began to reflect a few particles of brighter sky. The snow-clad summit of Iztacihuatl, or the White Woman, feebly glistened in the pale watery moonbeams, while Popocatepetl remained buried in the clouds.*

The streets and squares were deserted, although the night was not yet far advanced; for the loungers and promenaders, driven away by the weather, had returned to their homes. A deep silence brooded over the city, whose lights expired one after the other, and only at lengthened intervals could be heard on the greasy pavement the footsteps of the serenos, or watchmen, who performed their melancholy walk, with the indifferent air peculiar to that estimable corporation. At times a few discordant sounds, escaping from the velorios were borne along on the breeze; but that was all—the city seemed asleep.

Half-past nine was striking by the cathedral clock at the moment when a dull sound resembling the rustling of reeds shaken by the wind, was audible on the gigantic highway joining the city to the main land. This sound soon became more distinct, and changed into the trampling of horses, which was deadened by the damp air and the ground softened by a lengthened rain. A black mass emerged from the fog, and two horsemen wrapped in thick cloaks stood out distinctly in the moonlight.

These horsemen seemed to have

* See the "Indian Chief." Same publishers.

* This second volcano, whose name indicates "The Smoking Mountain," is near the former.

made a long journey; their steeds, covered with mud, limped at each step, and only advanced with extreme difficulty. They at length reached a low house, through whose dirty panes a doubtful light issued, which showed that the inhabitants were still awake.

The horsemen stopped before this house, which was an inn, and without dismounting, one of them gave the door two or three kicks, and called the host in a loud sharp voice. The latter, doubtless disturbed by this unusual summons at so improper an hour, was in no hurry to answer, and would have probably left the strangers for some time in the cold, if the man who had kicked, probably tired of waiting, had not thought of an expeditious means of obtaining an answer.

"Voto à Brios!" he shouted, as he drew a pistol from his holster and cocked it, "since this dog is resolved not to open, I will send a bullet through his window."

This menace had been scarce uttered ere the door opened as if by enchantment, and the landlord appeared on the threshold. This man resembled landlords in all countries; he had, like them, a sleek and crafty look, but at this moment his obsequiousness badly concealed a profound terror, evidenced by the earthy pallor of his face.

"Hola, caballero," he said, with a respectful bow, "have a little patience, if you please. Caramba! how quick you are; it is plain to see that you are forasteros, and not acquainted with the custom of our country."

"No matter who I am," the stranger answered sharply; "are you a landlord—yes or no?"

"I have that honor, caballero," the host remarked, with a deeper bow than the first.

"If you are so, scoundrel," the stranger exclaimed angrily, "by what right do you, whose duty it is to be at the orders of the public, dare to keep me waiting thus at your door?"

The landlord had a strong inclination to get into a passion, but the resolute tone of the man who addressed him, and, above all, the pistol he still held in his hand, urged him to prudence and moderation; hence he answered with profound humility—

"Believe me, senor, that if I had known what a distinguished caballero did me the honor of stopping before my humble dwelling, I should have hastened to open."

"A truce to such impertinent remarks, and open the door."

The landlord bowed without replying this time, and whistled a lad, who came to help him in holding the travellers' horses; the latter dismounted and entered the inn, while their tired steeds were led to the corral by the boy.

The room into which the travellers were introduced, was low, black, and furnished with tables and benches in a filthy state, and mostly broken, while the floor of stamped earth was greasy and uneven. Above the bar was a statuette of the Virgin de la Soledad, before which burned a greasy candle. In short, this inn had nothing attractive or comfortable about it, and seemed to be a *velorio* of the lowest class, apparently used by the most wretched and least honorable ranks of Mexican society.

A glance was sufficient for the travellers to understand the place to which accident had led them, still they did not display any of the disgust which the sight of this cut-throat den inspired them with. They seated themselves as comfortably as

they could at a table, and the one who had hitherto addressed mine host went on, while his silent companion leaned against the wall, and drew the folds of his cloak still higher up his face.

"Look here," he said, "we are literally dying of hunger, patron; could you not serve us up a morsel of something? I don't care what it is in the shape of food."

"Hum!" said the host with an embarrassed air, "it is very late, caballero, and I don't believe I have even a maize tortilla left in the whole house."

"Nonsense," the traveller replied, "I know all about it, so let us deal frankly with each other; give me some supper, for I am hungry, and we will not squabble about the price."

"Even if you paid me a piastre for every tortilla, excellency, I really could not supply you with two," the landlord replied, with increased constraint.

The traveller looked at him fixedly for a moment or two, and then laid his hand firmly on his arm, and pulled him toward the table.

"Now look here, No Lusacho," he said to him curtly, "I intend to pass two hours in your hovel, at all risks; I know that between this and eleven o'clock you expect a large party, and that all is prepared to receive them."

The landlord attempted to give a denial, but the traveller cut him short.

"Silence," he continued, "I wish to be present at the meeting of these persons; of course I do not mean them to see me; but I must not only see them, but hear all they say. Put me where you please, that is your concern; but as any trouble deserves payment, here are ten ounces for you, and I will give you

as many more when your visitors are gone, and I assure you that what I ask of you will not in any way compromise you, and that no one will ever know the bargain made between us—you understand me, I suppose? Now I will add, that if you obstinately refuse the arrangement I offer—"

"Well, suppose I do?"

"I will blow out your brains," the traveller said distinctly; "my friend here will put you on his shoulder, throw you into the water, and all will be over. What do you think of my proposal?"

"Hang it, excellency," the poor fellow answered with a grimace which attempted to resemble a smile, and trembling in all his limbs, "I think that I have no choice, and am compelled to accept."

"Good! now you are learning reason; but take these ounces as a consolation."

The landlord pocketed the money, as he raised his eyes to heaven and gave a deep sigh.

"Fear nothing, *viva Dios!*" the traveller continued, "all will pass off better than you suppose. At what hour do you expect your visitors?"

"At half-past ten, excellency."

"Good! it is half-past nine, we have time before us. Where do you propose to hide us?"

"In this room, excellency."

"Here, diabolo; whereabouts?"

"Behind the bar; no one will dream of looking for you there, and, besides, I shall serve as a rampart to you."

"Then you will be present at the meeting?"

"Oh!" he said with a smile, "I am nobody; the more so, that if I spoke, my house would be ruined."

"That is true. Well, then, all is settled; when the hour arrives, you

will place us behind the bar; but can my companion and I sit there with any degree of comfort?"

"Oh, you will have plenty of room."

"I fancy this is not the first time such a thing has occurred, eh?"

The landlord smiled, but made no answer: the traveller reflected for a moment.

"Give us something to eat," he at length said; "here are two piastres in addition for what you are going to place before us."

The landlord took the money, and forgetting that he had declared a few moments previously that he had nothing in the house, he instantly covered the table with provisions, which, if not particularly delicate, were, however, sufficiently appetizing, especially for men whose appetite appeared to be powerfully excited.

The two travellers vigorously attacked this improvised supper, and for about twenty minutes no other sound was heard but that of their jaws. When their hunger was at length appeased, the traveller who seemed to speak for both, thrust away his plate, and addressed the landlord, who was modestly standing behind him hat in hand.

"And now for another matter," he said; "how many lads have you to help you?"

"Two, excellency—the one who took your horses to the corral, and another."

"Very good. I presume you will not require both those lads to wait on your friends to-night?"

"Certainly not, excellency; indeed, for greater security I shall wait on them alone."

"Better still; then you see no inconvenience in sending one of them into the Ciudad; of course on the

understanding that he is well paid for the trip?"

"No inconvenience at all, excellency; what is the business?"

"Simply," he said, taking a letter from his bosom, "to convey this letter to Senor Don Antonio Rallier, in the Calle Secunda Monterilla, and bring me back the answer in the shortest possible period to this house."

"That is easy, excellency; if you will have the kindness to intrust the letter to me."

"Here it is, and four piastres for the journey."

The host bowed respectfully, and immediately left the room.

"I fancy, Curumilla," the traveller then said to his companion, "that our affairs are going on well."

The other replied by a silent nod of assent, and within a moment the landlord returned.

"Well?" the traveller asked.

"Your messenger has set off, excellency, but he will probably be some time ere he returns."

"Why so?"

"Because people are not allowed to ride about the city at night without a special authority, and he will be obliged to go and return on foot."

"No consequence, so long as he returns before sunrise."

"Oh, long before then, excellency."

"In that case all is for the best; but I think the moment is at hand when your friends will arrive."

"It is, excellency, so have the kindness to follow me."

"All right."

The travellers rose; in a twinkling the landlord removed all signs of supper, and then hid his guests behind the bar. This bar, which was very tall and deep, offered them a

perfectly secure, if not convenient, hiding-place, in which they crouched down with a pistol in each hand, in order to be ready for any event. They had scarce installed themselves ere several knocks, dealt in a peculiar fashion, were heard on the outer door.

CHAPTER X.

THE RANCHO.

IN one of our previous works we proved by documentary evidence that, since the declaration of its independence, that is to say, in about forty years, Mexico has reached its two hundred and thirtieth revolution, which gives an average of about five revolutions a year. In our opinion, this is very decent for a country which, if it pleased, regard being had to the retrograde measures adopted by the government, would have been justified in having at least one a month.

The causes of these revolutions are and must be ever the same in a country where the sabre rules without control, and which counts *twenty-four* thousand officers for an army of twenty thousand men. These officers, very ignorant generally, and very ambitious individually, incapable of executing the slightest manœuvre, or commanding the most simple movement, find in the general disorder chances of promotion which they would not otherwise have, and many Mexican generals have attained their elevated rank without having once been present at a battle, or even seen any other fire than that of the cigarettes they con-

stantly have in their mouths. The real truth is, they have skilfully pronounced themselves; each *pronunciamiento* has gained them a step, sometimes two, and with *pronunciamiento* after *pronunciamiento*, they have acquired the general's scarf, that is to say, the probability, with the aid of luck, of being in their turn proclaimed President of the Republic, which is the dream of all of them, and the constant object of their efforts.

We have said that the travellers had scarce time to conceal themselves in the bar, ere several knocks on the door warned the landlord that the mysterious guests he expected were beginning to arrive.

No Lusacho was a fat little man, with constantly-rolling gray eyes, a cunning look, and a prominent stomach—the true type of the Mexican Ranchero, who is more eager for gain than two Jews, and very ready when circumstances demand it—that is to say, when his own interests are concerned—to make a bargain with his conscience. He assured himself by a glance that all was in order in the room, and that there was nothing to cause the presence of strangers to be suspected, and then walked to the door; but, before opening, with the probable intention of displaying his zeal, he thought it advisable to challenge the arrivals.

"Quien vive?" he asked.

"Gente de paz!" a rough voice answered; "open in the Fiend's name, if you do not wish us to break in your door."

No Lusacho doubtless recognized the voice, for the somewhat brusque response appeared to him sufficient, and he immediately prepared to draw back the bolts.

The door was hardly ajar, ere

several men burst into the inn, thrusting each other aside in their haste, as if afraid of being followed. These men were seven or eight in number; and it was easy to see they were officers, in spite of the precaution of some among them who had put on civilian attire.

They laughed and jested loudly, which proved that, if they were conspirators, or, at least, if they were brought to this ill-famed den by any illicit object, that object, whatever it might be, did not spoil their gayety or appear to them of sufficient importance to render them unwontedly serious.

They seated themselves at a table, and the landlord who had doubtless long been acquainted with their habits, placed before them a bottle of Catalonian refino and a jug of pulque, which they straightway began swallowing while rolling their cigarettes.

The door of the rancho had been left ajar by the landlord, who probably thought it unnecessary to close it; the officers succeeded each other with great rapidity, and their number soon became so great, that the room, though very spacious, was completely filled. The new-comers followed the example of those who had preceded them; they seated themselves at a table, and began drinking and smoking, not appearing to trouble themselves about the earlier comers, to whom they merely bowed as they entered.

As for No Lusacho, he continually prowled round the tables, watching every thing with a corner of his eyes, and being careful not to serve the slightest article without receiving immediate payment. At length one of the officers rose, and, after rapping his glass on the table several times to attract attention, he asked:

Is Don Sirven here?"

"Yes, señor," a young man of twenty at the most answered as he rose. His effeminate features were already worn by precocious debauchery.

"Assure yourself that no person is absent."

The young man bowed, and began walking from one table to the other, exchanging two or three words in a low voice with each of the visitors. When Don Sirven had gone round the room, he went to the person who had addressed him, and said, with a respectful bow—

"Señor coronel, the meeting is complete, and only one person is absent; but as he did not tell us certainly whether he would do us the honor of being present to-night, I—"

"That will do, alferez," the colonel interrupted him; "remain outside the house, carefully watch the environs, and let no one approach without challenging him, but if you know who arrives, introduce him immediately. You have heard me: so execute my orders punctually; you understand the importance of passive obedience for yourself."

"You can trust to me, coronel," the young man answered; and, after bowing to his superior officer, he left the room and closed the door behind him.

The officers, then, without getting up, turned round on the benches, and thus found themselves face to face with the colonel, who had stationed himself in the middle of the room. The latter waited a few minutes till perfect silence was established, and then, after bowing to the audience, he spoke as follows:

"Let me, in the first place, thank you, caballeros, for the punctuality with which you have responded to the meeting I had the honor of ar-

ranging with you. I am delighted at the confidence it has pleased you to display in me, and, believe me, I shall show myself worthy of it; for it proves to me once again that you are really devoted to the interests of our country, and that it may freely reckon on you in the hour of danger."

This first portion of the colonel's speech was drowned in applause, as was only fitting. This colonel was a man of about forty years of age, of herculean stature, and looking more like a butcher than an honest soldier. His cunning looks did not at all inspire confidence, and every step in his profession had been the reward of an act of treachery. He was a most valuable man in a conspiracy on this account: for being so old a hand at pronunciamientos, people knew that he was too clever to join a losing cause; hence, he inspired his accomplices with unlimited confidence. After allowing time for the enthusiasm to calm, he continued—

"I am pleased, senors, not at this applause, but at the devotion you so constantly display for the public welfare. You understand as well as I do that we can no longer bow our necks beneath the despotic government that tyrannizes over us. The man who at this moment holds our destinies in his hands has shown himself unworthy of the mandate we confided to him; by failing in his duties toward us, he has liberated us from the oath of obedience we took to him. Human patience has its limits, and the hour will soon strike for the man who has deceived us to be overthrown."

The colonel had made a start, and would probably have continued his plausible speech for a long time in an emphatic voice, had not one of his audience, evidently wearied of find-

ing nothing positive or clear in this flood of sounding words, suddenly interrupted him—

"That is all very fine, colonel," he said, "*Rayo de Dios!* we are all aware that we are gentlemen devoted, body and soul, to our country; but devotion must be paid for, *cuerpo de Cristo!* What shall we get by all this after all? We have not assembled here to compliment each other; but, on the contrary, to come to a definite understanding. So pray come to the point at once."

The colonel was at first slightly embarrassed by this warm apostrophe; but he recovered himself at once, and turned with a smile to his interpreter—

"I was coming to it, my dear captain, at the very moment when you cut across my speech."

"Oh, that is different," the captain answered; "pray suppose that I had not spoken, and explain the affair in a couple of words."

"In the first place," the colonel went on, "I have news for you which I feel assured you will heartily welcome. This is the last time we shall meet."

"Very good," said the practical captain, encouraged by the winks of his companions, "let us hear first what the reward is."

The colonel saw that he could no longer dally with the matter, for all his hearers openly took part with their comrade, and murmurs of evil augury were beginning to be audible. At the moment when he resolved to tell all he knew, the door of the inn was opened, and a man wrapped in a large cloak quickly entered the room, preceded by the alferez Don Sirven, who shouted in a loud voice—

"The general. Caballeros, the general."

At this announcement silence was

re-established as if by enchantment. The person called the general stopped in the middle of the room, looked around him, and then took off his hat, let his cloak fall from his shoulders, and appeared in the full-dress uniform of a general officer.

"Long live General Guerrero!" the officers shouted, as they rose enthusiastically.

"Thanks, gentlemen, thanks," the general responded with numerous bows. "This warm feeling fills me with delight; but pray be silent, that we may properly settle the matter which has brought us here; moments are precious, and, in spite of the precautions we have taken, our presence at this inn may have been denounced."

All collected round the general with a movement of interest easy to understand. The latter continued—

"I will come at once to facts," he said, "without entering into idle speculations, which would cause us to waste valuable time. In a word, then, what is it we want? To overthrow the present government and establish another more in conformity with our opinions and, above all, our interests."

"Yes, yes," the officers exclaimed.

"In that case we are conspiring against the established authority, and are rebels in the eyes of the law," the general continued coolly and distinctly; "as such, we stake our heads, and must not attempt any self-deception on this point. If our attempt fails, we shall be pitilessly shot by the victor; but we shall not fail," he hastily added, on noticing the impression these ill-omened words produced on his hearers; "we shall not fail, because we are resolutely playing a terrible game, and each of us knows that his fortune depends on winning the game. From

the alferez up to the brigadier-general each knows that success will gain him two steps of promotion, and such a stake is sufficient to determine the least resolute to be staunch when the moment arrives to begin the struggle."

"Yes, yes," the captain, whose observations had, previous to the general's arrival, so greatly embarrassed the colonel, said, "all that is very fine. Jumping up two steps is a most agreeable thing; but we were promised something else in your name, excellency."

The general smiled.

"You are right, captain," he remarked; "and I intend to keep all promises made in my name—but not, as you might reasonably suppose, when our glorious enterprise has succeeded. If I waited till then, you might fear lest I should seek pretexts and excuses to evade their performance."

"When then, pray?" the captain asked, curiously.

"At once, senores," the general exclaimed, in a loud voice, and, addressing the whole company, "I wish to prove to you that my confidence in you is entire, and that I put faith in the word you pledged to me."

Joy, astonishment, incredulity, perhaps, so paralyzed his hearers, that they were unable to utter a syllable. The general examined them for a moment, and then, turning away with a mocking smile, he walked to the front door, which he opened. The officers eagerly watched his movements, with panting chests, and the general, after looking out, coughed twice.

"Here I am, excellency," a voice said, issuing from the fog.

"Bring in the bags," Don Sebastian ordered, and then quietly returned to the middle of the room.

Almost immediately after a man entered, bearing a heavy leather saddle-bag. It was Carnero, the capataz. At a signal from his master, he deposited his bundle and went out; but returned shortly after with another bag, which he placed by the side of the first one. Then, after bowing to his master, he withdrew, and the door closed upon him.

The general opened the bags, and a flood of gold poured in a trickling cascade on the table; the officers instinctively bent forward, and held out their quivering hands.

"Now, senores," the general said, still perfectly calm, as he carelessly rested his arm on the pile of gold; "permit me to remind you of our agreement; there are thirty-five of us at present, I believe?"

"Yes, general, thirty-five," the captain replied, who seemed to have appointed himself speaker in ordinary for self and partners.

"Very good; these thirty-five caballeros are thus sub-divided:—ten alferez, who will each receive twenty-five ounces of silver. Senor Don Jaime Lupo," he said, turning to the colonel, "will you be kind enough to hand twenty-five ounces to each of these gentlemen?"

The alferez, or sub-lieutenants, broke through the ranks, and boldly came up to receive their ounces, which the colonel delivered to each of them; then they fell back with a delight they did not attempt to conceal.

"Now," the general continued, "twelve captains, to each of whom I wish you to offer, on my behalf, Don Lupo, fifty ounces."

The captains pocketed the money with no more ceremony than the alferez had displayed.

"We have ten tenientes, each of whom is to receive thirty-five ounces I believe?"

The tenientes, or lieutenants, who had begun to frown on seeing the captains paid before them, received their money with a bow.

"There now remain the colonels, each of whom has a claim to one hundred ounces," the general said; "be kind enough to pay them, my dear colonel."

The latter did not let the invitation be repeated twice. Still the entire pile of gold was not exhausted, and a considerable sum still remained on the table. Don Sebastian Guerrero passed his hands several times through the glittering metal, and at length thrust it from him.

"Senores," he said, with an engaging smile, "about five hundred ounces remain, which I do not know what to do with; may I ask you to divide them among you, as subsistence money while awaiting the signal you are to receive from me?"

At this truly regal act of munificence, the enthusiasm attained its highest pitch; the cries and protestations of devotion became frenzied. The general alone remained impassive, and looked coldly at the division made by the colonel.

When all the gold had disappeared, and the effervescence was beginning to subside, Don Sebastian, who, like the Angel of Evil, had looked with a profoundly mocking smile at these men so utterly under the influence of cupidity, slightly tapped the table, to request silence.

"Senores," he said, "I have kept all my promises, and have acquired the right to count on you; we shall not meet again, but at a future day I will let you know my intentions. Still be ready to act at the first signal; in ten days is the anniversary festival of the Proclamation of Independence, and, if nothing deranges my plans, I shall probably choose that day to try, with your

assistance, to deliver the country from the tyrants who oppress it. However, I will be careful to have you warned. So now let us separate; the night is far advanced, and a longer stay at this spot might compromise the sacred interests for which we have sworn to die."

He bowed to the conspirators, but, on reaching the door, turned round again.

"Farewell, senors," he said, "be faithful to me."

"We will die for you, general," Colonel Lupo answered, in the name of all.

The general gave a final bow and went out; almost immediately the hoofs of several horses could be heard echoing on the paved street.

"As we have nothing more to do here, caballeros," the colonel said, "we had better separate without further delay; but do not forget the general's parting recommendation."

"Oh, no," the captain said, gleefully rattling the gold, with which his pockets were filled. "Don Sebastian Guerrero is too generous for us not to be faithful to him; besides, he appears to me at the present moment the only man capable of saving our unhappy country from the abyss. We are all too deeply attached to our country and too devoted to its real interests, not to sacrifice ourselves for it, when circumstances demand it."

The conspirators laughingly applauded this speech of the captain's, and after exchanging courteous bows, they withdrew as they had come; that is to say, they left the inn one after the other, not to attract attention. They carefully wrapped themselves in their cloaks, and went off in parties of three and four, with their hands on their

weapons, for fear of any unpleasant encounter.

A quarter of an hour later, the room was empty, and the landlord bolted the door for the night.

"Well, senores," he asked the two strangers, who now left the hiding-place in which they had been crouching for upwards of two hours, "are you satisfied?"

"We could not be more so," replied the one who had been the sole speaker hitherto.

"Yes, yes," the landlord continued, "three or four more pronunciamientos, and I believe I shall be able to retire on a decent competency."

"That is what I wish you, No Lusacho, and, to begin, a thing promised is a thing done; here are your ten ounces."

CHAPTER XI.

THE PASEO DE BUCARELLI.

MEXICO is a country of extensive prospects and magnificent views; and the poet Carpio is right when he says enthusiastically, in the poem in which he sings the praises of his country—

"Que magnificos tienes horizontes!"

In truth, the prospect is the first and greatest beauty of Mexico.

The plateau of Mexico is situated exactly in the centre of a circle of mountains. On all sides the landscape is bounded by admirable peaks, whose snowy crests soar above the clouds, and in the golden beams of the setting sun they offer the most sublime pictures of the imposing and grand Alpine nature.

In the general description we attempted of Mexico we omitted to allude to its promenades, of which we intended previously to give a detailed account.

In Europe, and especially in France, promenades are wanting in the interior of towns; and it is only during the last few years that Paris has possessed any worthy of a capital. In Spain, on the contrary, the smallest market-town has at least one alameda, where, after the torrid heat of the day, the inhabitants breathe the evening breeze, and rest from their labors. Alameda, a soft and graceful word to pronounce, which we might be tempted to take for Arabic, and to which some ill-informed scholars, unacquainted with Spanish, attribute a Latin origin, while it is simply Castilian, and literally signifies "a place planted with poplars."

The Alameda of Mexico is one of the most beautiful in America. It is situated at one of the extremities of the city, and forms a long square with a wall of circumvallation bordered by a deep ditch, whose muddy, fetid waters, owing to the negligence of the government, exhale pestilential miasmas. At each corner of the promenade a gate offers admission to carriages, riders and pedestrians, who walk silently beneath a thick awning of verdure, formed by willows, elms, and poplars that border the principal road. These trees are selected with great tact, and are always green, for although the leaves are renewed, it takes place gradually and imperceptibly, so that the branches are never entirely stripped of their foliage.

Numerous walks converge to open spots adorned with gushing fountains, and clumps of jessamine, myrtle and rose-bushes, surrounded by stone benches for the tired prome-

naders. Statues, unfortunately far below mediocrity in their execution, stand at the entrance of each walk; but, thanks to the deep shadow, the whistling of the evening breeze in the deep foliage, the buzz of the humming-birds flying from flower to flower, and the harmonious strains of the centzonles hidden in the fragrant clumps, you gradually forget those unlucky statues, and fall into a gentle reverie, during which the mind is borne to unknown regions, and seems no longer connected with earth.

But Mexico is a thorough country of contrasts. At each step barbarism elbows the most advanced civilization. Hence all the carriages, after driving a few times round the Alameda, take the direction of the Paseo de Bucarelli, and the promenaders spread over a walk, in the centre of which there is a large window in the wall, protected by rusty iron bars, and through which come puffs of poisoned air. It is the window of the Dead-house, into which are daily thrown pell-mell the bodies of men, women, and children, assassinated during the previous night, hideous, bloody, and disfigured by death! What a brilliant, what a delicious idea to have placed the Dead-house exactly between the two city walks!

The Paseo, or promenade, of Bucarelli—so called after the Viceroy who gave it to Mexico—resembles the Champs Elysées of Paris. It is, in reality, merely a wide road, with no other ornament than a double row of willow and beech trees, with two circular places, in the centre of which are fountains, adorned with detestable allegorical statues and stone benches for pedestrians.

At the entrance of the Paseo de Bucarelli has been placed an equestrian statue of Charles IV., which in 1824 adorned the Plaza Mayor

of Mexico. When the Emperor Iturbide fell, this monument was removed from the square and placed in the University Palace-yard—a lesson, we may here remark, given by a comparatively barbarous people to civilized nations, who in revolutions, as a first trial of liberty, and forgetting that history records every thing in her imperishable annals, carry their Vandalism so far as to destroy every thing that recalls the government they have overthrown. Owing to the intelligent moderation of the Mexicans, the promenaders can still admire, at the Bucarelli, this really remarkable statue, due to the talent of the Spanish sculptor, Manuel Tolsa, and cast in one piece by Salvador de la Vega. The sight of this masterpiece ought to induce the Mexican municipality to remove the pitiable statues which disgrace the two finest promenades in the city.

From the Paseo de Bucarelli a magnificent prospect is enjoyed of the panorama of mountains bathed in the luminous vapors of night; you perceive through the arches of the gigantic aqueduct the white fronts of the haciendas clinging to the sides of the Sierra, the fields of Indian corn bending softly before the breeze, and the snowy peaks of the volcanoes, crowned with mist, and lost in the sky.

It is not till night has almost set in that the promenaders, leaving the Alameda, proceed to the Bucarelli, where the carriages take two or three turns, and then equipages, riders, and pedestrians, retire one after the other. The promenade is deserted, the entire crowd, just now so gay and noisy, has disappeared as if by enchantment, and you only see between the trees some belated promenader, who, wrapped in his cloak, and with eye and ear on the

watch, is hastily returning home, for, after nightfall, the thieves take possession of the promenade, and without the slightest anxiety about the serenos and celadores appointed to watch over the public security, they carry on their trade with a boldness which the certainty of impunity can alone engender.

It was evening, and, as usual, the Alameda was crowded; handsome carriages, brilliant riders, and modest pedestrians were moving backwards and forwards, with cries, laughter, and joyous calls, as they sought or chased each other in the walks. Monks, soldiers, officers, men of fashion, and leperos, were mixed together, carelessly smoking their cigars and cigarettes under each other's noses, with the recklessness and negligence peculiar to southern nations.

Suddenly, the first stroke of the Oracion broke through the air. At the sound of the Angelus-bell, as if the entire crowd had been struck by an enchanter's wand, horses, carriages, and pedestrians stopped, the seated citizens left the benches on which they were resting, and a solemn silence fell on all; every person took off his hat, crossed himself, and for four or five minutes this crowd, an instant before so noisy, remained dumb and silent. But the last stroke of the Oracion had scarce died away, ere horses and carriages set out again; the shouts, the songs, and talking, became louder than before; each resumed the sentence at the point where he had broken it off.

By degrees, however, the promenaders proceeded toward the Bucarelli; the carriages became scarcer, and by the time night had quite set in, the Alameda was completely deserted.

A horseman, dressed in a rich

Campesino costume, and mounted on a magnificent horse, which he managed with rare skill, then entered the Alameda, along which he galloped for about twenty minutes, examining the sidewalks, the clumps of trees, and the densest bushes: in a word, he seemed to be looking for somebody or something.

However, after a while, whether he had convinced himself that his search would have no result, or for some other motive, he gave the click of the tongue peculiar to the Mexican *ginetes*, lifted his horse which started at an amble, and proceeded toward the Paseo de Bucarelli, after bowing sarcastically to some ill-looking horsemen who were beginning to prowl round him, but whom his vigorous appearance and haughty demeanor had hitherto kept at arm's length.

Although the darkness was too dense at this moment for it to be possible to see the horseman's face distinctly, which was in addition half covered by the brim of his vicuna hat, all about him evidenced strength and youth: he was armed as if for a nocturnal expedition, and had on his saddle, in spite of police regulations, a thin, carefully rolled up *reata*.

We will say, parenthetically, that the *reata* is considered in Mexico so dangerous a weapon, that it requires special permission to carry one at the saddle-bow, in the streets of Mexico.

The *salteadores*, who occupy the streets after nightfall, and reign with undisputed sway over them, employ no other weapon to stop the persons they wish to plunder. They cast the running knot round their necks, dash forward at full speed, and the unlucky man half strangled, and dragged from the saddle, falls unresistingly into their hands.

At the moment when the traveller we are following reached the Bucarelli, the last carriages were leaving it, and it was soon as deserted as the Alameda. He galloped up and down the promenade twice or thrice, looking carefully down the side rides, and at the end of his third turn a horseman, coming from the Alameda, passed on his right hand, giving him in a low voice the Mexican salute, "Santissima noche, caballero!"

Although this sentence had nothing peculiar about it, the horseman started, and immediately turning his horse round, he started in pursuit of the person who had thus greeted him. Within a minute the two horsemen were side by side; the first comer, so soon as he saw that he was followed, checked his horse's pace, as if with the intention of entering into the most direct communication with the person he had addressed.

"A fine night for a ride, *senor*," the first horseman said, politely raising his hand to his hat.

"It is," the second answered, "although it is beginning to grow late."

"The moment is only the better chosen for certain private conversation."

The second horseman looked around, and bending over to the speaker, said—

"I almost despaired of meeting you."

"Did I not let you know that I should come?"

"That is true; but I feared that some sudden obstacle—"

"Nothing ought to impede an honest man in accomplishing a sacred duty," the first horseman answered, with an emphasis on the words.

The other bowed with an air of

satisfaction. "Then" he said, "I can count on you, No ____."

"No names here, señor," the other sharply interrupted him. "Caspita, an old wood-ranger like you, a man who had long been a ~~hero~~ hero, ought to remember that the trees have ears and the leaves eyes."

"Yes, you are right. I should and do remember it; but permit me to remark that if it is not possible for us to talk about business here, I do not know exactly where we can do so."

"Patience, señor, I wish to serve you, as you know, for you were recommended to me by a man to whom I can refuse nothing. Let yourself, therefore, be guided by me, if you wish us to succeed in this affair, which, I confess to you at once, offers enormous difficulties, and must be managed with the greatest prudence."

"I ask nothing better; still you must tell me what I ought to do."

"For the present very little; merely follow me at a distance to the place where I purpose taking you."

"Are we going far?"

"Only a few paces; behind the barracks of the Accordades, in a small street called the Callejon del Pajaro."

"Hum! and what am I to do in this street?"

"What a suspicious man you are?" the first horseman said with a laugh. "Listen to me then. About the middle of the Callejon I shall stop before a house of rather poor appearance; a man will come and hold my horse while I enter. A few minutes later you will pull up there; after assuring yourself that you are not followed you will dismount; give your horse to the man who is holding mine, and without saying a word to him, or letting him see your face, you will enter the

house, and shut the door after you. I shall be in the yard, and will lead you to a place where we shall be able to talk in safety. Does that suit you?"

"Famously; although I do not understand why I, who have set foot in Mexico to-day for the first time, should find it necessary to employ such mighty precautions."

The first horseman laughed sarcastically.

"Do you wish to succeed?" he asked.

"Of course," the other exclaimed energetically, "even if it cost me my life."

"In that case do as you are recommended."

"Go on, I follow you."

"Is that settled? you understand all about it?"

"I do."

The second horseman then checked his steed to let the first one go on ahead, and both keeping a short distance apart, proceeded at a smart trot toward the statue of Charles IV., which, as we have said, stands at the entrance of the Paseo.

While conversing, the two horsemen had forgotten the advanced hour of the night, and the solitude that surrounded them. At the moment when the first rider passed the equestrian statue, a slip knot fell on his shoulders, and he was roughly dragged from his saddle.

"Help!" he shouted in a choking voice.

The second rider had seen all; quick as thought he whirled his lasso round his head, and galloping at full speed, hurled it after the Salteador at the moment when he passed twenty yards from him.

The Salteador was stopped dead, and hurled from his horse; the worthy robber had not suspected that another person beside himself could

have a lasso so handy. The horseman, without checking his speed, cut the reata that was strangling his companion, and turning back, dragged the robber after him.

The first horseman so providentially saved, freed himself from the slip knot that choked him, and, hardly recovered from the alarm he had experienced from his heavy fall, he whistled to his horse, which came up at once, remounted as well as he could, and rejoined his liberator, who had stopped a short distance off.

"Thanks," he said to him, "henceforth we are stanch friends; you have saved my life, and I shall remember it."

"Nonsense," the other answered, "I only did what you would have done in my place."

"That is possible, but I shall be grateful to you on the word of a Carnero," he exclaimed, forgetting in his joy the hint he had given a short time previously, not to make use of names, and revealing his own incognito; "is the picaro dead?"

"Very nearly so I fancy; what shall we do with him?"

"Make a corpse of him," the capataz said bluntly. "We are only two paces from the Dead-house, and he can be carried there without difficulty. Though he is an utter scoundrel and tried to assassinate me, the police are so well managed in our unhappy country that if we committed the imprudence of letting him live, we should have interminable disputes with the magistrates."

Then, dismounting, he stooped over the bandit, stretched senseless at his feet, removed his lasso, and coolly dashed out his brains with a blow of his pistol butt. Immediately after this summary execution, the two men left the Paseo de Bucarelli, but this time side by side, through fear of a new accident.

CHAPTER XII.

A CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATION.

DIRECTLY on emerging from the Paseo, the two men separated, as had been agreed on between them; that is to say, the capataz went ahead, followed at a respectful distance by Martial the Tigrero, whom the reader has doubtless recognized.

All happened as the capataz had announced. The streets were deserted, the horsemen only met a few half-sleeping serenos leaning against the walls, and were only crossed by a patrol of celadores walking with a hurried step, and who seemed more inclined to avoid them, than to try and discover the motives that caused them thus to ride about the streets of the capital at night in defiance of the law.

The Tigrero entered the Callejon del Pajaro, and about the middle of the street saw the capataz's horse held by an ill-looking fellow, who gazed curiously at him. Don Martial following the instructions given him, pulled his hat over his eyes to foil the mozo's curiosity, stopped before the door, dismounted, threw his bridle to the fellow, and without saying a word to him, resolutely entered the house and carefully closed the door after him.

He then found himself in utter darkness, but after groping his way, which was not difficult for him to do, as all Mexican houses are built nearly on the same model, he pushed forward. After crossing the saguan, he entered a square yard on which several doors looked; one of these doors was open, and a man was standing on the threshold with a cigarette in his mouth. It was Carnero.

The tiger-slayer went up to him; the other made room, and he walked

on. The capataz took him by the hand and whispered, "Come with me."

In spite of the protestations of devotion previously made by the capataz, the Tigrero in his heart was alarmed at the manner in which he was introduced into this mysterious house; but as he was young, vigorous, well armed, brave, and resolved, if necessary, to sell his life dearly, he yielded his hand unhesitatingly to Carnero, and allowed him to guide him while seeking to pierce the darkness that surrounded him.

But all the windows were hermetically closed with shutters, which allowed no gleam of light to enter from without.

His guide led him through several rooms, the floors of which were covered with matting that deadened the sound of footsteps; he took him up a flight of stairs, and opening a door with a key he took from his pocket, conducted him into a room faintly lighted by a lamp placed before a statue of the Virgin, standing in one corner of the room, on a species of pedestal attached to the wall, and covered with extremely delicate lace.

"Now," said Carnero, after closing the door, from which the Tigrero noticed that he removed the key, "draw up a butacca, sit down and let us talk, for we are in safety." Don Martial followed the advice given him, and after carefully installing himself in a butacca, looked anxiously around him.

The room in which he found himself was rather spacious, furnished tastefully and richly; several valuable pictures hung on the walls, which were covered with embossed leather, while the furniture consisted of splendidly-carved ebony or mahogany tables, sideboards, cheffoniers, and butaccas. On the floor

was an Indian petate, several books were scattered over the tables, and valuable plate was arranged on the sideboard. In short, this room displayed a proper comprehension of comfort, and the two windows, with their Moorish jalousies, gave admission to the pure breeze which greatly refreshed the atmosphere.

The capataz lighted two candles at the Virgin's lamp, placed them on the table, and then fetching two bottles and two silver cups, which he placed before the Tigrero, he drew up a butacca, and seated himself opposite his guest.

"Here is sherry which I guarantee to be real Xeres de los Caballeros; this other bottle contains chinquirito, and both are at your service," he said, with a laugh; "whether you have a weakness for sugar-cane spirits, or prefer wine."

"Thanks," Don Martial replied; "but I do not feel inclined to drink."

"You would not wish to insult me by refusing to hob-nob with me?"

"Very well; if you will permit me, I will take a few drops of chinquirito in water, solely to prove to you that I am sensible of your politeness."

"All right," the capataz continued, as he handed him a crystal decanter, covered with curiously-worked silver filagree; "help yourself."

When they had drunk, the capataz a glass of sherry, which he sipped like a true amateur, and Don Tigrero a few drops of chinquirito drowned in a glass of water, the capataz placed his glass again on the table with a smack of his lips, and said—

"Now, I must give you a few words in explanation of the slightly mysterious way in which I brought you here, in order to dispel any

doubts which may have involuntarily invaded your mind."

"I am listening to you," the Tigrero answered.

"Take a cigar first; they are excellent." And he lit one, after pushing the bundle over to Don Martial; the latter selected one, and soon the two men were enveloped in a cloud of thin and fragrant smoke.

"We are in the mansion of General Don Sebastian Guerrero," the capataz continued.

"What?" the Tigrero exclaimed, with a start of uneasiness.

"Reassure yourself, no one saw you enter, and your presence here is quite unknown, for the simple reason that I brought you in by my private entrance."

"I do not understand you."

"And yet it is very easy to explain; the house I led you through belongs to me. For reasons too long to tell you, and which would interest you but slightly, during Don Sebastian's absence as Governor of Sonora, I had a passage made, and established a communication between my house and this mansion. Everybody save myself is ignorant of the existence of this communication, which," he added, with a glowing smile, "may at a given moment be of great utility to me. The room in which we now are forms part of the-suite I occupy in the mansion, in which the general, I am proud to say, has never yet set foot. The man who took your horse is devoted to me, and even were he to betray me, it would be of little consequence to me, for the secret door of the passage is so closely concealed that I have no fear of its being discovered. Hence you see that you have nothing to fear here, where your presence is unknown."

"But suppose you were to be

sent for, through the general happening to want you suddenly?"

"Certainly, but I have foreseen that; it is my system never to leave any thing to chance. Although it has never happened yet, no one can enter here without my being informed soon enough to get rid of any person who may be with me, supposing that, for some reason or another, that person did not desire to be seen."

"That is capitally arranged, and I am happy to see that you are a man of prudence."

"Prudence is, as you know, senor, the mother of safety; and in Mexico, before all other countries, the proverb receives its application at every moment."

The Tigrero bowed politely, but in the fashion of a man who considers that the speaker has dwelt sufficiently long on one subject, and wishes to see him pass to another. The capataz appeared to read this almost imperceptible hint on Don Martial's face, and continued with a smile—

"But enough on that head: so let us pass, if you have no objection, to the real purpose of our interview. A man, whose name it is unnecessary to mention, but to whom, as I have already had the honor of telling you, I am devoted body and soul, sent you to me to obtain certain information you require, and which he supposes I am in a position to give. I will now add, that what passed between us this evening, and the generous way in which you rushed to my assistance, render it my bounden duty not only to give you this information, but also to help you with all my might in the success of the projects you are meditating, whatever those projects may be, and the dangers I may incur in

aiding you. So, now speak openly with me; conceal nothing from me and you will only have to praise my frankness towards you."

"Senor," the Tigrero answered, with considerable emotion, "I thank you the more heartily for your generous offer, for you know as well as I do what perils are connected with the carrying out of these plans, to say nothing of their success."

"What you are saying is true, but it will be better, I fancy, for the present, for me to assume to be ignorant of them, so as to leave you the entire liberty you need for the questions you have to ask me."

"Yes, yes," he said, shaking his head sadly, "my position is so precarious, the struggle I am engaged in is so wild, that, although I am supported by sincere friends, I cannot be too prudent. Tell me, then, what you know as to the fate of the unfortunate Dona Anita de Torrès. Is she really dead, as the report spread alleged?"

"Do you know what happened in the cavern after you fell down the precipice?"

"Alas! no; my ignorance is complete as to the facts that occurred after I was abandoned as dead."

Carnero reflected for a moment. "Listen, Don Martial: before I can answer categorically the question you have asked me, I must tell you a long story. Are you ready to hear it?"

"Yes," the other answered, without hesitation, "for there are many things I am ignorant of, which I ought to know. So speak without further delay, senor, and though some parts of the narrative will be most painful to me, hide nothing from me, I implore you!"

"You shall be obeyed. Moreover the night is not yet far advanced;

time does not press us, and in two hours you will know all."

"I am impatiently waiting for you to begin."

The capataz remained for some considerable time plunged in deep and serious reflection. At length he raised his head, leant forward, and setting his left elbow on the table, began as follows:

"At the time when the facts occurred I am about to tell you, I was living at the Hacienda del Palmar, of which I was steward. Hence I was only witness to a portion of the facts, and only know the rest from hearsay. When the Comanches arrived, guided by the white men, Don Sylva de Torrès was lying mortally wounded, holding in his stiffened arms his daughter Anita, who had suddenly gone mad on seeing you roll down the precipice in the grasp of the Indian chief. Don Sebastian Guerrero was the only relation left to the helpless young lady, and hence she was taken to his hacienda."

"What?" Don Martial exclaimed in surprise. "Don Sebastian is a relation of Dona Anita?"

"Did you not know that?"

"I had not the slightest idea of it; and yet I had for several years been closely connected with the Torrès family, for I was their tigrero."

"I know it. Well, this is how the relationship exists: Don Sebastian married a niece of Don Sylva's, so you see they were closely connected. Still, for reasons never thoroughly made known, a few years after the general's marriage, a dispute broke out which led to a total suspension of intimacy between the two families. That is probably the reason why you never heard of the connection existing between the Sylvas and the Torrès."

The Tigrero shook his head. "Go on," he said. "How did the general receive his relation?"

"He was not at the hacienda at the time; but an express was sent off to him, and I was the man. The general came post haste, seemed greatly moved at the double misfortune that had befallen the young lady, gave orders for her to be kindly treated, appointed several women to wait on her, and returned to his post at Sonora, where events of the utmost gravity summoned him."

"Yes, yes; I have heard of the French invasion, and that their leader was shot by the general's orders. I presume you are alluding to that?"

"Yes. Almost immediately after these events the general returned to the Palmar. He was no longer the same man. The horrible death of his daughter rendered him gloomier and harsher to any person whom chance brought into contact with him. For a whole week he remained shut up in his apartments, refusing to see any of us; but, at last, one day he sent for me to inquire as to what had happened at the hacienda during his absence. I had but little to tell him, for life was too simple and uniform at this remote dwelling for any thing at all interesting for him to have occurred. Still he listened without interruption, with his head in his hands, and apparently taking great interest in what I told him, especially when it referred to poor Dona Anita, whose gentle, interesting madness drew tears from us rough men, when we saw her wandering, pale and white as a spectre, about the huerte, murmuring in a low voice one name, ever the same, which none of us could overhear, and raising to heaven her lovely face,

bathed in tears. The general let me say all I had to say, and when I ended he, too, remained silent for some time. At length, raising his head, he looked at me for a moment angrily.

"What are you doing there?" he asked.

"I am waiting," I answered, "for the orders it may please your excellency to give me."

He looked at me for a few more moments as if trying to read my very thoughts, and then laid his hand on my arm. "Carnero," he said to me, "you have been a long time in my service, but take care lest I should have to dismiss you. I do not like," he said, with a stress on the words, "servants who are too intelligent and too clear-sighted," and when I tried to excuse myself, he added, "Not a word—profit by the advice I have given you, and now lead me to Dona Anita's apartments."

I obeyed with hanging head; the general remained an hour with the young lady, and I never knew what was said between them. It is true that now and then I heard the general speaking loudly and angrily, and Dona Anita weeping, and apparently making some entreaty to him; but that was all, for prudence warned me to keep at too great a distance to overhear a single word. When the general came out, he was pale, and sharply ordered me to prepare every thing for his departure. The morrow at day-break we set out for Mexico, and Dona Anita followed us, carried in a palanquin. The journey was a long one, but so long as it lasted the general did not once speak to the young lady, or approach the side of her palanquin. So soon as we reached our journey's end, Dona Anita was carried to the Convent of the Bernardines, where

she had been educated, and the good sisters received her with tears of sorrowful sympathy. The general, owing to the influence he enjoyed, easily succeeded in getting himself appointed guardian to the young lady, and immediately assumed the management of her estates, which, as you doubtless are aware, are considerable, even in this country where large fortunes are so common."

"I know it," said the Tigrero, with a sigh.

"All these matters settled," the capataz continued, "the general returned to Sonora to arrange his affairs, and hand over the government to the person appointed to succeed him, and who started for his post some days previously. I will not tell you what happened then, as you know it; besides, we have only been back in Mexico for a fortnight, and you and your friends followed our track from the Rocky Mountains."

The Tigrero raised his head. "Is that really all?" he asked.

"Yes," the capataz answered.

"On your honor?" Don Martial added, looking fixedly at him.

Carnero hesitated. "Well, no," he said at last, "there is something else I must tell you."



CHAPTER XIII.

DON MARTIAL.

THE capataz rose, opened a door, went out for a moment, returned to his seat opposite the Tigrero, poured himself out a glass of sherry, which he swallowed at a draught, and then letting his head fall in his hands, remained silent.

Don Martial watched with amazement the various movements of the capataz. Seeing at last that he did not seem inclined to make the confession he was so impatiently awaiting, he went over and touched him slightly. Carnero started as if suddenly branded with a hot iron.

"What you have to reveal to me must be very terrible," the Tigrero at length said in a low voice.

"So terrible, my friend," the capataz answered, with an amount of terror impossible to depict, "that though alone with you in this room, where no spy can be concealed, I fear to tell it you."

The Tigrero shook his head sadly. "Speak, my friend," he said, in a gentle voice, "I have suffered such agony during the last few months, that all the springs of my soul have been crushed by the fatal pressure of despair. However horrible may be the blow that menaces me, I will endure it without flinching; alas! grief has no longer power over me."

"Yes, you are a man carved in granite. I know that you have struggled triumphantly against lost fortunes; but, believe me, Don Martial, there are sufferings a thousand-fold more atrocious than death—sufferings which I do not feel the right of inflicting on you."

"The pity you testify for me is only weakness. I cannot die before I have accomplished the task to which I have devoted the wretched existence heaven left me in its wrath. I have sworn, at the peril of my life, to protect the girl who was betrothed to me in happier times."

"Carry out your oath, then, Don Martial; for the poor child was never in greater peril than she is at present."

"What do you mean? In heaven's name explain yourself," the Tigrero said passionately.

"I mean that Don Sebastian covets the incalculable wealth of his ward, which he needs for the success of his ambitious plans; I mean that remorselessly and shamelessly laying aside all human respect, forgetting that the unfortunate girl the law has confided to him is insane, he coldly intends to become her murderer."

"Go on, go on! what frightful scheme can this man have formed?"

"Oh!" the capataz continued with savage irony; "the plan is simple, honest, and highly praised by some persons, who consider it admirable, even sublime."

"You will tell me?"

"Well, know all, then; General Don Sebastian Guerrero intends to marry his ward."

"Marry his ward, he!" Don Martial exclaimed with horror, "'tis impossible."

"Impossible?" the capataz repeated with a laugh. "Oh, how little you know this man with the implacable will, this wild beast with a human face, who pitilessly breaks every one who dares to resist him. He is resolved to marry his ward in order to strip her of her fortune, and he will do so, I tell you."

"But she is mad!"

"I allow she is."

"What priest would be so unnatural as to bless this sacrilegious marriage?"

"Nonsense," the capataz said with a shrug of his shoulders, "you forget, my good sir, that the general possesses the talisman which renders every thing possible, and purchases every thing—men, women, honor, and conscience; he has gold."

"That is true, that is true," the Tigrero exclaimed in despair, and burying his face in his hands he remained motionless, as if suddenly struck by lightning.

There was a lengthened silence, during which nothing was audible but the choking sobs that burst from Don Martial's heaving chest. It was a heart-rending sight to see this strong, brave man so tried by adversity, now conquered and almost crushed by despair, and weeping like a frightened child.

The capataz, with his arms crossed on his chest, pale forehead and eyebrows contracted almost till they met, looked at him with an expression of gentle and sympathizing pity.

"Don Martial," he at length said, in a sharp and imperative voice.

"What do you want with me?" the Tigrero asked, looking up with surprise.

"I want you to listen to me, for I have not said all yet."

"What more can you have to tell me?" the other asked sadly.

"Arouse yourself like the man you are, instead of remaining any longer crushed beneath the pressure of despair, like a child or a weak woman. Is there no hope left in your heart?"

"Did you not tell me that this man had an implacable will which nothing could resist?"

"I did say so; I allow; but is that a reason for giving up the struggle? do you suppose him invulnerable?"

"Yes," he exclaimed eagerly, "I can kill him."

The capataz shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"Kill him," he repeated, "nonsense; that is the vengeance of fools! Moreover, you will still be able to do that when all other means failed. No—you can do something else."

Don Martial looked at him earnestly. "You hate him too then, since you do not fear to speak to me as you are doing?"

"No matter whether I hate him

or not, so long as I am willing to serve you."

"That is true," the Tigrero muttered.

"Besides," the capataz continued, "do you forget who recommended you to me?"

"Valentine," said Don Martial.

"Valentine; yes, Valentine, who saved my life as you have done, and to whom I have vowed an eternal gratitude."

"Oh," Don Martial said mournfully, "Valentine himself has given up any further contest with this demon."

The capataz grinned savagely. "Do you believe that?" he asked ironically.

"What matter?" the Tigrero muttered.

"Grief makes you egotistic, Don Martial," the other replied; "but I forgive you on account of the sufferings I have most unluckily caused you."

He broke off, poured out a glass of sherry, swallowed it, and sat down again on his butacea.

"He would be a bad physician," he continued, "who, having performed a painful operation, did not know how to apply the proper remedies to cicatrize and cure it."

"What do you mean?" the Tigrero exclaimed, interested, in spite of himself, by the tone in which those words were uttered.

"Do you believe," the capataz continued, "do you believe, my friend, that I would have inflicted such great pain on you if I had not possessed the means to cause an immense joy to succeed it? Tell me, do you believe that?"

"Take care, señor," the Tigrero said in a trembling voice, "take care what you are about, for I know not why, but I am beginning to regain hope, and I warn you that if

this last illusion which you are trying to produce were to escape me this time, you would kill me as surely as if you stabbed me with a dagger."

The capataz smiled with ineffable gentleness. "Hope, my friend; hope, I tell you," he said, "that is exactly what I want to bring you to; for I wish you to have faith in me."

"Speak, señor," he replied; "I will listen to you with confidence, for I do not believe you capable of sporting so coldly with agony like mine."

"Good, we have reached the point I have been aiming at so long. Now listen to me. I told you, I think, that on her arrival in Mexico, Dona Anita was taken by Don Sebastian to the Convent of the Bernardines?"

"Yes! I fancy I can remember your saying so."

"Very good. Dona Anita was received with open arms by the good nuns who had educated her. The young lady, on finding herself again among the companions of her childhood, treated with kind and intelligent care, wandering unrestrained beneath the lofty trees that had sheltered her early years, gradually felt calmness returning to her mind; her grief by degrees gave way to a gentle melancholy; her ideas, overthrown by a frightful catastrophe, regained their balance; in short, the madness which had spread its black wings over her brain was driven away by the soft caresses of the nuns, and soon entirely disappeared."

"So, then," Don Martial exclaimed, "she has regained her reason?"

"I will not venture to assert that, for she is still insane in the opinion of everybody."

"But in that case ——" the Tigrero said in a panting voice.

"In that case," the capataz continued, purposely laying a stress on every word, while fixing a magnetic glance on the Tigrero, "as all the world believes it, it must be so till the contrary is proved."

"But how did you learn all these details?"

"In the most simple manner. My master, Don Sebastian, has sent me several times to the convent with messages, and chance decreed that I recognized in the sister-porter a relation of mine, whom I thought dead long ago. The worthy woman, in her delight, and perhaps, too, to make up for the long silence she is compelled to maintain, tells me whenever she sees me all that is said and done in the convent, and there is a good deal to learn from the conversation of a nun. She takes a good deal of interest in me, and as I am fond of her too, I listen to her with pleasure. Now, do you understand?"

"Oh! go on. Go on!"

"Well, this time I have nearly finished. It appears, from what my relation tells me, that the nuns, and the Mother Superior before all, are utterly opposed to the general's plans of marriage."

"Oh, the holy women!" the Tigrero exclaimed with simple joy.

"Are they not?" the capataz said with a laugh. "This is probably the reason why they keep so secret the return of their boarder to her senses, for they doubtless hope that, so long as the poor girl is mad, the general will not dare contract the impious union he is meditating; unfortunately, they do not know the man with whom they have to deal, and the ferocious ambition that devours him—an ambition for the gratification of which he will recoil from no crime, however atrocious it may be."

"Alas!" the Tigrero said despairingly; "you see, my friend, that I am lost."

"Wait, wait, my good sir; your situation, perhaps, is not so desperate as you imagine it."

"My heart is on fire."

"Courage; and listen to me to the end. Yesterday I went to the convent, the Mother Superior, to whom I had the honor of speaking, confided to me, under the seal of secrecy—for she knows that, although I am a servant of Don Sebastian, I take a deep interest in Dona Anita, and would be glad to see her happy—that the young lady has expressed an intention to confess."

"Ah, for what reason? do you know?"

"No, I do not!"

"But that desire can be easily satisfied, I presume, there are plenty of monks and priests attached to the convent."

"Your observation is just; still it appears that, for reasons I am equally ignorant of, neither the Mother Superior nor Dona Anita wishes to have one of those monks or priests for confessor, hence —"

"Hence?" Don Martial quickly interrupted him.

"Well, the Mother Superior asked me to bring her a priest or monk in whom I had confidence."

"Ah!"

"You understand, my friend."

"Yes, yes! Oh, God! go on!"

"And to take him to the convent."

"And," Don Martial asked, in a choking voice, "have you found this confessor?"

"I believe so," the capataz answered, with a smile; "and pray, what do you think, Don Martial?"

"Yes, I do too," he exclaimed, joyfully. "At what time are you to take this confessor to the convent?"

"To-morrow, at the *Oracion*."

"Very good, and I presume you have arranged a place to meet him?"

"Caspita! I should think so; he is to meet me at the *Parian*, where I shall be at the first stroke of the *Oracion*."

"I am certain that he will be punctual!"

"And so am I; and now, *senor*, do you consider that you have lost your time in listening to me?"

"On the contrary," Don Martial replied, as he offered him his hand with a smile, "I consider you a first-rate hand at telling a story."

"You flatter me."

"No, indeed, I do not. I consider, too, that the nuns of St. Bernard are excellent and holy women."

"Caspita! I should think so; they have a relation of mine as portress."

The two men burst into a frank and hearty laugh, whose explosion no one could have anticipated from the way in which their interview began.

"Now, we must separate," the capataz said, as he rose.

"What, already?"

"I have to accompany my master to-night on an excursion outside the city."

"Some plot, I presume?"

"I am afraid so; but what would you have? I am forced to obey."

"In that case, turn me out of doors."

"That is what I am going to do; by-the-by, have you seen Don Valentine since you arrived?"

"Not yet. This long delay makes me anxious; and if it were not so late, or if I knew my road, I would go and ask hospitality of Don Antonio Rallier, his fellow-countryman, so as to obtain news of him."

"That is of no consequence. Do you know Don Antonio's address?"

"Yes, he lives in the *Secunda Monterilla*."

"It is close by; if you wish it, I will have you taken there."

"I should feel greatly obliged; but by whom?"

"Caspita! have you forgotten the man to whom you intrusted your horse? he will act as your guide."

"A thousand thanks!"

"It is not worth them. Will you take a walk to-morrow in the *Parian*?"

"I am so anxious to see your confessor that I shall not fail to be there."

The two men smiled again.

"Now, give me your hand, and let us be off."

They went out of the room; the capataz led the *Tigrero* by the same passage, walking along in the darkness as if it were broad day, and they soon found themselves beneath the saguan of the small house. The capataz thrust his head out after opening the door cautiously. The street was deserted, and after looking up and down it, he whistled in a peculiar way, and in a few minutes footsteps were heard, and the peon appeared holding the *Tigrero*'s horse by the bridle.

"Good-bye, *senor*," the capataz said. "I thank you for the delightful evening you have caused me to spend. Pilloto, lead this *senor*, who is a *forastero*, to the *Secunda Monterilla*, and point out to him the house of *Senor* Don Antonio Rallier."

"Yes, *mi amo*," the peon answered laconically.

The two friends exchanged a parting salutation; the *Tigrero* mounted, and followed Pilloto, while the capataz re-entered the house and closed the door after him. After numberless turnings and windings, the rider

and the footman at length entered a street which, from its width, the Tigrero suspected to form part of the fashionable quarter.

"This is the Secunda Monterilla," said the peon, "and that gentleman," he added, pointing to a horseman who was coming toward them, followed by three footmen also mounted and well-armed, "is the very Don Antonio you are looking for."

"You are sure of it?" the Tigrero asked.

"Carai! I know him well."

"If that is the case, accept this piastre, my friend, and go home, for I no longer need your services."

The peon bowed and retired. During the conversation the newcomer had halted in evident alarm.

"'Tis I, Don Antonio," the Tigrero shouted to him. "Come on without fear—I am a friend."

"Oh, oh! it is very late to meet a friend in the street," Don Antonio answered, though he advanced without hesitation, after laying his hand on his weapon to guard against a surprise.

"I am Martial, the Tigrero."

"Oh, that is different; what do you want? A lodging, eh? I will have you led to my house by a servant, and there leave you till tomorrow, as I am in a hurry."

"Agreed; but allow me one word."

"Speak!"

"Where is Don Valentine?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Excessively."

"Then come with me, for I am going to him!"

"Heaven has sent him thus opportunely," the Tigrero exclaimed, as he drew his horse up alongside Don Antonio's.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VELORIO.

IT was very late when the conspirators separated, and when the last groups of officers left the rancho, the sound of the Indian horses and mules proceeding to market was audible on the paved highway. Although the darkness was still thick, the stars were beginning to die out in the heavens; the cold was becoming sharper—in a word, all foretold that day would soon break.

The two travellers had seated themselves again at a corner of the table, opposite one another, and were dumb and motionless as statues. The host walked about the room with a busy air, apparently arranging and clearing up, but very anxious in reality, and desirous, in his heart, to be rid as soon as possible of these two singular customers whose silence and sobriety inspired him with but slight confidence.

At length the person who had always spoken on his own behalf and that of his companion struck the table twice, and the landlord hurried up at this summons.

"What do you wish for, excellency?" he asked, with an obsequious air.

"I tell you what, landlord," the stranger continued, "it strikes me that your criado is a long time in returning; he ought to have been back before this."

"Pardon me, excellency, but it is a long journey from here to the Secunda Monterilla, especially when you are obliged to walk it. Still, I believe the peon will soon be back."

"May Heaven hear you! Give us each a glass of tamarind water."

At this moment, when the land-

lord brought the draught, there was a tap at the door.

"Perhaps it is our man," the stranger said.

"That is possible, your excellency," the landlord answered, as he went to open the door on the chain, which left only a passage of a few inches, much too narrow for the visitor to enter the house against the wish of its owner. This precautionary measure, which is at once very prudent and simple, is generally adopted all through Mexico, owing to the slight confidence with which the police organization in this blessed country, which is the refuge of scoundrels of every description, inspires the inhabitants.

After exchanging a few words in a low voice with the new arrival, the landlord unhooked the chain and opened the door.

"Excellency," he said to the stranger, who was slowly sipping his tamarind water, "here is your messenger."

"At last," the traveller, said, gladly, as he placed his horn mug on the table.

The peon entered, politely doffed his hat and bowed.

"Well, my friend," the stranger asked him, "did you find the person to whom I sent you?"

"Yes, excellency, I had the good fortune to find him at home on his return from a tertulia in the Calle San Agustin."

"Ah, ah! and what did he say on receiving my note?"

"Well, excellency, he is a cabalero, for sure; for he first gave me a piastre, and then said to me, 'Go back as quick as you can walk, and tell the gentleman who sent you that I shall be at the meeting he appoints as soon as yourself!'"

"So that——"

"He will probably be here in a few minutes."

"Very good, you are a clever lad," the stranger answered; "here is another piastre for you, and now you can retire."

"Thanks, your excellency," the peon said, joyfully pocketing his piastre. "Carai! I should be a rich man with only two nights a month like this."

And after bowing a second time, he left the room to go and sleep, in all probability, in the corral. The peon had told the truth, for he had scarce left the room ten minutes ere a rather loud voice was heard without: horses stamped, and not only was the door struck, but there were several loud calls.

"Open the door without fear," the stranger said; "I know that voice."

The ranchero obeyed, and several persons entered the inn.

"At last you have returned, my dear Valentine," the new-comer exclaimed in French, as he walked quickly towards the travellers, who, for their part, went to meet him.

"Thanks for your promptitude in responding to my invitation, my dear Rallier," the hunter answered.

The ranchero bit his lips on hearing them talk in a language he did not understand.

"Hum! they are Ingleses," he muttered spitefully. "I suspected they must be gringos."

It is a general rule with the lower class Mexicans that all foreigners are English, and consequently hunters or gringos."

"Come here, No Lusacho," Valentine said, addressing the landlord, who was turning his hat between his fingers with an air of considerable embarrassment, "I have to talk on important matters with these gentlemen, and as I do not wish to

be disturbed by you, I propose that you should give me up this room for an hour."

"Excellency," he muttered.

"I understand, you expect to be paid. Very good, I will pay you, but on condition that no one, not even yourself, comes in till I call."

"Still, your excellency——"

"Listen to me without interruption. Day will not break for two hours, so you will not open your rancho till then; and, consequently, you have no customers to expect. I will pay an ounce for each hour; will that suit you?"

"I should think so, your excellency; at that price I will sell you the whole day if you wish."

"That is not necessary," the hunter said, with a laugh; "but you understand I want fair play—no ears on the listen, or eyes at the slits of the panelling."

"I am an honest man, your excellency."

"I am ready to believe so; but I warn you, because in the event of my seeing an eye or an ear lap, I shall immediately fire a bullet at it as a recommendation to prudence, and I have the ill-luck to be a dead shot. Does the bargain suit you with those conditions?"

"Perfectly, your excellency. I shall keep a strict watch over my people, so that you shall not be disturbed."

"You are a splendid landlord, and I predict that you will make a rapid fortune, for I see that you thoroughly understand your own interests."

"I try to satisfy the gentry who honor my poor abode with their presence."

"Excellently reasoned! Here are the two promised ounces, and four piastres in the bargain for the re-

freshments you are going to serve us. Have these gentlemen's horses taken to the corral, and have the goodness to leave us."

The landlord bowed with a grimacing smile, brought, with a speed far from common with people of his calling, the refreshments ordered, and gave the hunter a deep bow.

"Now," he said, "your excellency is in your own house, and no one shall enter without your orders."

While Valentine was making this bargain with the ranchero, his friends remained silent, laughing inwardly at the hunter's singular mode of proceeding, and the unanswerable arguments he employed to avoid an espionage almost always to be found in such places, when the master does not scruple to betray those who pay him best.

"Now," said Valentine, so soon as the door closed behind the landlord, "we shall talk at least in safety."

"Speak Spanish, my friend," said M. Rallier.

"Why so? It is so delightful to converse in one's own tongue, when, like me, you have so few opportunities for doing so. I assure you that Curumilla will not feel offended."

"Hum; I did not say this on behalf of the chief, whose friendship for you I am well acquainted with."

"Who then?"

"For Don Martial, who has accompanied me, and has important matters to communicate to you."

"Oh, oh, that changes the question," said the hunter, at once substituting Spanish for the French he had hitherto employed. "Are you there, my dear Don Martial?"

"Yes, senor," the Tigrero answered, emerging from the gloom in

which he had remained up to this moment, "and very happy to see you."

"Who else have you brought with you, Don Antonio?"

"Me, my friend," said a third person, as he let the folds of his cloak fall. "My brother thought that it would be better to have a companion, in the event of an alarm."

"Your brother was right, my dear Edward, and I thank him for the good idea, which procures me the pleasure of shaking your hand a few moments sooner. And now, senores, if you are agreeable, we will sit down and talk, for, if I am not mistaken, we have certain things to tell each other which are most important for us."

"That is true!" Antonio Rallier answered, as he sat down, in which he was immediately imitated by the rest.

"If you like," Valentine continued, "we will proceed in regular rotation; that is, I fancy, the way to finish more quickly, for you know that moments are precious."

"First, and before all else, my friend," said Antonio Rallier, "permit me to thank you once again, in my own name and that of my family, for the services you rendered me in our journey across the Rocky Mountains. Without you, without your watchful friendship and courageous devotion, we should never have emerged from those frightful gorges, but must have perished miserably in them."

"What good is it, my friend, to recal at this moment—"

"Because," Antonio Rallier continued eagerly, "I wish you to be thoroughly convinced that you can dispose of us all as you please. Our arms, purses, and hearts, all belong to you."

"I know it, my friend, and you see that I have not hesitated to make use of you, at the risk even of compromising you. So let us leave this subject, and come to facts. What have you done?"

"I have literally followed your instructions; according to your wish, I have hired and furnished for you a house in Tacuba Street."

"Pardon me, but you know that I am very slightly acquainted with Mexico, for I have visited that city but rarely, and each time without stopping."

"The Tacuba is one of the principal streets in Mexico; it faces the palace, and is close to the street in which I reside with my family."

"That is famous. And in whose name did you take the house?"

"In that of Don Serapio de la Ronda. Your servants arrived two days ago."

"You mean—"

"I mean Belhumeur and Black Elk; the former is your steward and the latter your valet. They have made all the arrangements, and you can arrive when you please."

"To-day, then."

"I will act as your guide."

"Thank you; what next?"

"Next, my brother Edward has taken, in his own name at the San Lazaro gate, a small house, where ten horses, belonging to the purest mustang breed, were at once placed in a magnificent corral."

"That concerns Curumilla; he will live in that house with your brother."

"And now one other thing, my friend."

"Speak!"

"You will not be angry with me?"

"With you? nonsense!" said Valentine, holding out his hand.

"Not knowing whether you had

sufficient funds at your disposal—and you will agree with me that you will require a large sum——”

“I know it. Well?”

“Well, I——”

“I see I must come to your assistance, my poor Antonio. As you believe me a poor devil of a hunter not possessed of a farthing, and are so delicate-minded yourself, you have placed in a corner of the room, or in some article of furniture, of which you want to give me the key and don’t know how, fifty or perhaps one hundred thousand piastres, with the reservation to offer me more, should not that sum prove sufficient.”

“Would you be angry with me, had I done so?”

“On the contrary, I should be most grateful to you.”

“In that case I am glad.”

“Glad of what, my dear Antonio?”

“That you accept the hundred thousand piastres.”

Valentine smiled.

“I am delighted to find that you are the man I judged you to be. Still, while thanking you from my heart for the service you wish to render me, I do not accept it.”

“Do you refuse, Valentine?” he said, mournfully.

“Let us understand each other, my friend. I do not refuse; I simply tell you that I do not want the money, and here is the proof,” he added, as he took from his pocket a folded paper, which he handed to his countryman, “you, as a banker, may know the firm of Thornwood, Davidson & Co.”

“It is the richest in San Francisco.”

“Then open that paper and read.”

Mr. Rallier obeyed.

“An unlimited credit opened at

my house,” he exclaimed, in a voice tremulous with joy.

“Does that displease you?” Valentine asked, with a smile.

“On the contrary; but you must be rich in that case.”

A cloud of sadness passed over the hunter’s forehead.

“I have grieved you, my friend.”

“Alas! as you know, there are certain wounds which never close. Yes, my friend, I am rich; Curumilla, Belhumeur, and myself alone, now that my foster-brother is dead, know in Apacheria the richest placer that exists in the world. It was for the purpose of going to this placer that I did not accompany you to Mexico; now you understand; but what do I care for this incalculable fortune, when my heart is dead, and the joy of my life is forever annihilated!”

And under the weight of the deep emotion that crushed him, the hunter hung his head down and stifled a sob. Curumilla arose amid the general silence, for no one ventured to offer ordinary consolation for this grief, and laid his hand on Valentine’s shoulder—

“Koutonepi,” he said to him in a hollow voice, “remember that you have sworn to avenge our brother.”

The hunter drew himself up as if stung by a serpent, and pressing the hand the Indian offered him, he looked at him for a moment with strange fixedness.

“Women alone weep for the dead, because they are unable to avenge them,” the Indian continued in the same harsh, cutting accent.

“Yes, you are right,” the hunter answered with feverish energy; “I thank you, chief, for having recalled me to myself.”

Curumilla laid his friend’s hand on his heart, and stood for an instant

motionless; at length he let it fall, sat down again, and wrapping himself in his sarape, he returned to his habitual silence, from which so grave a circumstance alone could have aroused him. Valentine passed his hand twice over his forehead, which was bathed in cold perspiration, and attempted a faint smile.

"Forgive me, my friends, for having forgotten, during a moment, the character I have assumed," he said in a gentle voice.

Their hands were silently extended to him.

"Now," he exclaimed in a firm voice, in whose notes traces of the past tempest were still audible, "let us speak of that poor Dona Anita de Terres."

"Alas!" said the elder Rallier, "I cannot tell you any thing, although my sister Helena, her companion at the Convent of the Bernardines, to which I sent her in accordance with your wish, has let me know that she would have grand news for us in a few days."

"I will give you that news, with your permission," Don Martial said at this moment, suddenly joining in the conversation, to which he had hitherto listened with great indifference.

"Do you know any thing?" Valentine asked him.

"Yes, something most important; that is why I was so anxious to speak with you."

"Speak then, my friend, speak, we are listening."

The Tigrero, without further pressing, at once reported, in the fullest details, his interview with Don Sebastian Guerrero's capataz. The three Frenchmen listened with the most serious attention, and when he had finished his story, Valentine rose—

"Let us be off, senors," he said,

"we have no time to lose; perhaps heaven offers us, at this moment, the opportunity we have been so long awaiting."

The others rose without asking the hunter for any explanation, and a few minutes later Valentine and his comrades were galloping along the highway in the direction of Mexico.

"I do not know what diabolical plot they are forming," No Lusacho muttered, on seeing them disappear in the distance; "but they are worthy gentlemen, and let the ounces slip through their fingers like so much water."

And he entered the rancho, the door of which he now left open, for day was breaking.



CHAPTER XV.

THE CONVENT OF THE BERNARDINES.

THE history of colonies is the same everywhere, that is to say, that you find the old belief, the forgotten manners and customs of the mother country intact, and almost exaggerated.

Mexico was to Spain what Canada still is to France. In Mexico we therefore find the Spain of the monks, with all the abuses of a degenerate monastic life; for we are compelled to state that with few, very few exceptions, the monks of Mexico are far from leading an exemplary life. A few years ago a Papal legate arrived at Mexico, who had been sent to try and introduce into the monasteries reforms which had become urgent; but he soon recognized the impossibility of suc-

cess, and returned as he came. This is the history of yesterday and to-day, and in the way things are going on, it will be the history of to-morrow.

In spite of the innumerable revolutions, the Mexican monks are still very rich. Among other uses to which they put their money, the best is, perhaps, lending it out at six per cent., which, let us hasten to add, is a great blessing in a country where the ordinary interest on borrowed money is sixteen to eighteen per cent. Still, it appears to us, and we trust the remark will not be taken in bad part, but little in harmony with the vocation of the monks and the pure doctrines of religion, which is so opposed to lending money out at interest, for it has ever seen in it disguised usury.

We will add, at the risk of incurring the blame of some persons, and of appearing to emit a paradox, that in this collection of Christian religious buildings there seems to be kept up the tradition of the great Mexican Teocali, which contained within its walls seventy-eight buildings devoted to the Aztec worship.

In the first place, what is the religion professed in Spanish America? It certainly is not the Catholic faith; and this we can affirm with a safe conscience, and supply proof if necessary. The Americans of the south, like all southern peoples, are instinctively Pagans, fond of war and holidays, making a god of each saint, adoring the Virgin under a hundred different forms, digging up the old Aztec idols, placing them in all the Mexican churches, and offering them worship under the characteristic denomination of Santes antiguos, or ancient saints.

What can be said after this? Simply that the Hispano-Americans never understood the religion they

were compelled to profess; that they care but very little for it, and in their hearts cling to their old worship in the terrific proportion of the native to the European population, that is to say two-thirds to one. Hence the demoralization of the masses, which is justly complained of, but is the fault of those persons who, at the outset, believed they could establish the religion of Christ in their countries by fire and sword—a system, we are bound to add, scrupulously followed by the Spanish clergy, up to the Proclamation of the Independence of the colonies.

The Convent of the Bernardines is situated but a short distance from the Paseo de Bucarelli. Not one of the religious communities for women scattered over Mexico is so rich as this one; for the kings of Spain and nobles of the highest rank gave it large endowments, which, in the course of time, have grown into an immense fortune.

The vast site occupied by the Convent of the Bernardines, the thick walls that surround it, and the numerous domes that crown it, sufficiently indicate the importance it enjoys at the present day.

Like all the Mexican convents, and especially that at San Francisco, to which it bears a distant resemblance, the Convent of the Bernardines is defended by thick walls, flanked by massive buttresses, which give it the appearance of a fortress. Still the peaceful belfries, and their cupolas of enamelled porcelain covering so many chapels, allow the pious destination of the edifice to be recognized. An immense paved court leads to the principal chapel, which is adorned with a luxury that it would be difficult to form an idea of in our skeptical Europe.

Behind this first court is the space reserved for the nuns, consisting of

immense cloisters, adorned with pictures by old masters, and white jasper basins from which limpid fountains rise. Next come immense *huertas* with umbrageous walks, wide court-yards, a rich and valuable library in which the scientific wealth of Mexico lies buried, eight spacious, comfortable, and airy dormitories, four hundred cells for the nuns, and a refectory in which four hundred guests can sit without crowding.

On the day when we introduce the reader into the Convent of the Bernardines, at about five in the evening, three persons, collected in a leafy arbor, almost at the end of the garden, were talking together with considerable animation.

Of these persons, one, the eldest, was a nun, while the other two, girls of from sixteen to eighteen years of age, wore the garb of novices.

The first was the Mother Superior of the convent, a lady of about fifty years of age, with delicate and aristocratic features, gentle manners, and noble and majestic demeanor, whose face displayed kindness and intelligence.

The second was Dona Anita; we will not draw her portrait, for the reader has long been acquainted with her.* The poor girl, however, was pale and white as a corpse, her fever-parched eyes were not easy, fixed on any object, and she looked about her hurriedly and desperately.

The third was Dona Helena Rallier, a light-haired, blue-eyed girl, with a saucy look, whose velvety cheeks, and noble and well-defined features, revealed the candor and innocence of youth, combined with the laughing expressions of a boarder spoiled by an indulgent governess.

Dona Helena was standing a little outside the arbor, leaning against a tree, and seemed like a vigilant sentry carefully watching lest the conversation between the Mother Superior and her companion should be disturbed.

Dona Anita, seated on a stone bench by the side of the Abbess, with her hand in the elder lady's, and her head resting on her shoulder, was speaking to her in a faltering voice and broken sentences which found difficulty in passing her parted lips, while the tears silently ran down her cheeks, which suffering had rendered pale.

"My kind mother," she said, and her voice was harmonious as the sigh of an Aeolian harp, "I know not how to thank you for your inexhaustible kindness towards me. Alas! you are at present my only friend; why may I not be allowed to remain always by your side? I should be so glad to take my vows and pass my life in this convent under your benevolent protection."

"My dear child," the Abbess said gently, "God is great, his power is infinite; hence, why despair? Alas! doubt leads to denial; you are still almost a child. Who knows what joy and happiness the future may still have in store for you?"

The maiden gave a heavy sigh. "Alas!" she murmured, "the future no longer exists for me, my kind mother; a poor orphan, abandoned without protection to the power of an unnatural relation, I must endure fearful tortures, and, under his iron yoke, lead a life of suffering and grief."

"Child," the Abbess said, with gentle sternness, "do not blaspheme; you are still ignorant, I repeat, of what the future may have in store for you. You are ungrateful at this moment—ungrateful and selfish."

* See "Tiger Slayer." Same publishers.

"I ungrateful! holy mother!" the maiden objected.

"Yes, you are ungrateful, Anita, to us and to yourself. Do you consider it nothing, after the frightful misfortune that burst on you, to have returned to this convent in which your childhood was spent, and to have found among us that family which the world refused you? Is it nothing to have near you hearts that pity you, and voices that incessantly urge you to have courage?"

"Courage, sister," Dona Helena's sweet voice said at this moment, like a soft echo.

The maiden hid her lovely tear-bedewed face in the besom of the Mother Superior.

"Pardon me, mother," she continued, "pardon me, but I am crushed by this struggle, which I have carried on so long without hope. The courage you attempt to give me cannot, in spite of my efforts, penetrate to my heart; for I have the fatal conviction that, whatever you may do, you will not succeed in preventing the frightful misfortune suspended over my head."

"Let us reason a little, my child, like sensible persons; up to the present, at least, we have succeeded in concealing from everybody the happy return of your senses."

"Happy!" she sighed.

"Yes, happy; for with the intellect faith, that is to say, strength returned to you. Well, while your guardian believes you still insane, and is compelled, in spite of himself, to suspend his schemes with reference to you, I have been employing all the influence my high position gives me, and my family connections. I have had a petition on your behalf presented to the President of the Republic by sure hands; this petition is supported by the greatest names in Mexico, and I ask in it that the

marriage with which you are menaced may not be contracted against your will; in a word I ask that your guardian may be prevented taking any steps till you are in a proper condition to say yes or no."

"Have you really done that, my good mother?" the maiden exclaimed, as she threw her arms in real delight round the elder lady's neck.

"Yes, I have done so, my child, and I am expecting every moment a reply, which I hope will be favorable."

"Oh, mother, my real mother, if that succeeds I shall be saved."

"Do not go from one extreme to the other, my child; all is uncertain yet, and heaven alone knows whether we shall be successful."

"Oh, God will not abandon a poor orphan."

"God, my child, chastens those he loves; have confidence in him, and his right hand will be extended over you to sustain you in adversity."

"Sister Redemption is coming this way, holy mother," Dona Helena said at this moment.

At a sign from the Mother Superior, Dona Anita withdrew to the other end of the bench on which she was seated, folded her arms on her chest, and let her head droop.

"Are you looking for our mother, sister?" Dona Helena asked a rather elderly lay sister, who was looking to the right and left as if really seeking somebody.

"Yes, sister," the lay sister answered, "I wish to deliver a message with which I am entrusted for our mother."

"Then enter this arbor, sister, and you will find her reposing there."

The lay sister entered the arbor, approached the Mother Superior, stopped modestly three paces from

her, folded her arms on her breast, looked down respectfully, and waited till she was spoken to.

"What do you desire, daughter?" the Mother Superior asked her.

"Your blessing, in the first place, holy mother," the lay sister answered.

"I can give it you, daughter; and now what message have you for me?"

"Holy mother, a gentleman of lofty bearing, called Don Serapio de la Ronda, wishes to speak with you privately; the sister porter took him into the parlor, where he is waiting for you."

"I will be with him directly, daughter; tell the sister porter to apologize in my name to the gentleman, if I keep him waiting longer than I like, owing to my advanced age. Go on, I follow you."

The lay sister bowed respectfully to the abbess, and went away to deliver the message with which she was entrusted. The abbess rose, and the two girls sprang forward to support her; but she stopped them.

"Remain here till the *Oracion*, my children," she said to them, "converse together; but be prudent, and do not let yourselves be surprised; after the *Oracion*, you will come and converse in my cell."

Then after giving Dona Anita a parting kiss, the Mother Superior went away, sorely troubled in mind at this visit from a man she did not know, and whose name she now heard for the first time. When she entered the parlor, the abbess examined with a hasty glance the person who asked to see her, and who, on perceiving her, rose from his chair, and bowed to her respectfully. This first glance was favorable to the stranger, in whom the reader has doubtless already recognized Valentine Guillois.

"Pray, resume your seat, cabal-

lero," the abbess said to him, "if your conversation is to last any time, we shall talk more comfortably when sitting."

Valentine bowed, offered the lady a chair, and then returned to his own.

"Senor Don Serapio de la Ronda was announced to me," the lady continued after a short silence.

"I am that gentleman, madam," Valentine said courteously.

"I am at your orders, caballero, and ready to listen to any communication you may have to make."

"Madam, I have nothing personal to say to you; I am merely commissioned by the Minister of the Home Department to deliver you this letter, to which I have a few words to add."

While uttering this sentence with exquisite politeness, Valentine offered the abbess a letter bearing the ministerial arms.

"Pray open the letter, madam," he added, on seeing that, through politeness, she held it in her hand unopened, "you must render yourself acquainted with its contents in order to understand the meaning of the words I have to add."

The abbess, who in her heart was impatient to know what the minister had to say to her, offered no objection and broke the seal of the letter, which she hurriedly perused. On reading it a lively expression of joy lit up her face.

"Then," she exclaimed, "his excellency deigns to grant my request?"

"Yes, madam; you remain, until fresh orders, responsible for your young charge. You have only to deal with the minister in the matter; and," he added, with a purposed stress upon the words, "in the event of General Guerrero, the guardian of Dona Anita, trying to force you

into surrendering her to him, you are authorized to conceal the young lady, who is for so many reasons an object of interest, in any house of the order you please."

"Oh, señor," she answered, her eyes filling with tears of joy, "pray thank his excellency in my name for the act of justice he has deigned to perform in favor of this unfortunate young lady."

"I will have that honor, madam," Valentine said, as he arose; "and now that I have delivered my message, permit me to take leave of you, while congratulating myself that I was selected by his Excellency the Minister to be his intermediary with you."

At the moment when Valentine left the convent, Carnero entered it, accompanied by a monk, whose hood was pulled down over his face. The hunter and the capataz exchanged a side glance, but did not speak.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CONFESSOR.

MEXICO, as we have already stated, was, after the conquest, completely rebuilt on the original plan, so that, at the present day, it offers nearly the same sight as struck Cortéz when he entered it for the first time. The Plaza Mayor, especially, some years back, before the French innovations, more or less good, were introduced, offered towards evening a most picturesque scene.

This immense square is bounded on one side by the Portales de Mercaderos; heavy arches supported on one side by immense stones, and

on the other by pilasters, at the foot of which are the alacenas or shops.

The ayuntamiento, the president's palace, the cathedral, the sagrario, the portal de las flores, an immense bazaar for merchandize, and the Parian, also a bazaar, complete, or rather completed, at the period when our history takes place, the fourth side of the square, for recently great changes have taken place, and the Parian, among other buildings, has disappeared. The handsomest streets, such as the Tacuba, Mint, Monterilla, Santo Domingo, etc., debouche on the great square.

The cathedral stands exactly on the site of the ancient great Mexican Teocalli, all the buildings of which it has absorbed; unfortunately this building, which is externally splendid, does not come up internally to the idea, formed of it, for its ornaments are in bad taste, poor and paltry.

Between five and six in the evening, or a few minutes before Oracion, the appearance of the Plaza Mayor becomes really fairy-like. The crowd of strollers—a strange crowd, were there every one—flocks up from all sides at once, composed of horsemen, pedestrians, officers, priests, soldiers, campesinos, leperos, Indian women in red petticoats, ladies of fashion in their sayas, and all the people come, go, cross and jostle each other, mingling their conversation with the cries of children, the vociferations of the leperos, who torment purchasers with their impetuosity, and the shrill appeals of the sellers of tamales and queratero, crouching in the shade of the porticos.

A few minutes before the Oracion, a Franciscan monk, recognizable by his blue gown, and silken cord round his waist, and whose large

white felt hat, pulled down over the eyes, almost completely concealed his face, came from the Calle Monterilla, and entered the Plaza Mayor.

This man, who was tall and apparently powerfully built, walked slowly, with hanging head and arms crossed on his chest, as if plunged in serious reflection. Instead of entering the thronged Portales, he crossed the square and proceeded towards the Parian, which was very lively at the moment, for the Parian was a bazaar, resembling the Temple of Paris, and was visited at this period by persons, the leanness of whose purses only allowed them to purchase here their jewellery and smart clothing, which, in any other part of the city would have been much too expensive for them.

Not attending to the noise or movement around him, the Franciscan leant his shoulder against the stall of an evangelista, or public writer, and looked absently and wearily across the square. He did not remain long in this position, however, for just after he had reached the Parian, the Oracion began. At the first peal of the cathedral bells, all the noises ceased in the square; the crowd stopped, heads were uncovered, and each muttered a short prayer in a low voice.

At the last stroke of the Oracion, a hand was laid on the Franciscan's shoulder, while a voice whispered in his ear—

"You are exact to the rendezvous, Señor Padre."

"I am performing my duty, my son," the monk at once answered, turning round.

In the person who addressed him he doubtless recognized a friend, for he offered him his hand by a spontaneous movement.

"Are you still resolved to attempt

the adventure?" the first speaker continued.

"More than ever, señor."

"Bear in mind that you must not mention my name; we do not know each other; you are a monk from the San Franciscan monastery, whom I fetched to confess a young novice at the Convent of the Bernardines. It is understood that you do not know who I am?"

"My brother, we poor monks are at the service of the afflicted; our duty orders us to help them when they claim our support; as we have no name for society, we are forbidden to ask that of those who summon us."

"Excellently spoken," the other replied, repressing a smile. "You are a monk according to my own heart. I see that I am not deceived with respect to you; come, then, my father, we must not keep the person waiting who is expecting us."

The Franciscan bowed his assent, placed himself on the right of his singular friend, and both went away from the Parian, where the noise had become louder than ever, after the angelos had ceased ringing. The two men passed unnoticed through the crowd, and walked in the direction of the Convent of the Bernardines, going along silently, side by side.

We have said that at the convent-gate they passed Don Serapio de la Ronda, that is to say, Valentine Guillois, and that the three men exchanged a side glance full of meaning. The sister-porter made no objection to admitting the Franciscan; and his guide, so soon as he saw him inside the convent, took leave of him after exchanging a few common-place compliments with the sister. The latter respectfully led the monk into a parlor, and after begging him to

wait a moment, went away to inform the Mother Superior of the arrival of the confessor whom the young novice had requested to see.

We will leave the Franciscan for a little while to his meditations, and return to the two young ladies whom we left in the garden. So soon as the abbess had withdrawn, they drew closer together, Dona Helena taking the seat on the bench previously occupied by the abbess.

"My dear Anita," she said, "let me profit by the few minutes we are left alone to impart to you the contents of a letter I received this morning; I feared that I should be unable to do so, and yet it seems to me that what I have to tell you is most important."

"What do you mean, my dear Helena? Does the letter to which you refer interest me?"

"I cannot positively explain to you, but it will be sufficient for you to know that my brothers are very intimate with a countryman of ours who takes the greatest interest in you, and what I have to tell you relates to this Frenchman."

"That is strange," said Dona Anita, pausing. "I never knew but one Frenchman, and I have told you the sad story which was the cause of all the misfortunes that overwhelmed me. But the Frenchman whom my father wished me to marry died under frightful circumstances; then who can this gentleman be who takes so lively an interest in me—do you know him?"

"Very slightly," the young lady answered with a blush, "but sufficiently to be able to assure you that he possesses a noble heart. He does not know you personally; but," she added, as she drew a letter from her bosom, and opened it, "this is the passage in my brother's

letter which refers to you and him. Shall I read it to you?"

"Pray read it, my dear Helena, for I know the friendship you and your family entertain for me; hence, it is with the greatest pleasure I receive news of your brothers."

"Listen, then," the young lady continued, and she read, after seeking for the passage—

"Valentine begs me, dear sister, to ask you to tell your friend—that is you," she said, breaking off.

"Go on," Dona Anita answered, whose curiosity had been aroused by the name Helena had pronounced, though it was impossible for her to know who that person was.

"To tell your friend," Dona Helena continued, "that the confessor she asked for will come to the convent this very day after the Oracion. Dona Anita must arm herself with courage, which is as necessary to endure joy as grief, for she will learn to-day some news possessing immense importance for the future." That is underlined," the young lady added, as she bent over to her friend, and pointed to the sentence with the tip of her rosy finger.

"That is strange," Dona Anita murmured. "Alas! what news can I learn?"

"Who knows?" said her young companion, and then continued—"Before all, Dona Anita must be prudent; and however extraordinary what she hears may appear to her, she must be careful to conceal the effect produced by this revelation, for she must not forget that if she have devoted friends, she is closely watched by all-powerful enemies, and the slightest imprudence would hopelessly neutralize all the efforts that we are making to save her. You cannot, my dear sister, lay suf-

ficient stress on this recommendation.' The rest," the maiden added, with a smile, "only relates to myself, and it is, therefore, unnecessary for me to read it to you."

And she refolded the letter, which disappeared in her dress again.

"And now, my darling, you are warned," she said; "so be prudent."

"Good heaven! I do not understand the letter at all, nor do I know the Valentine to whom it alludes. It was by your advice that I asked for a confessor."

"That is to say, by my brother's advice, who, as you know, Anita, placed me here, not merely because I love you as a sister, but also to support and encourage you."

"And I am grateful both to you and him for it, dear Helena; if I had not you near me, in spite of the friendship our worthy and kind mother condescends to grant me, I should long ago have succumbed to my grief."

"The question is not about me at this moment, my darling, but solely about yourself. However obscure and mysterious my brother's recommendation may be, I know him to be too earnest and too truly kind for me to neglect it. Hence I cannot find language strong enough to urge you to prudence."

"I seek in vain to guess what the news is to which he refers; and I acknowledge that I feel a secret repugnance to see the confessor he announces to me. Alas! I have every thing to fear, and nothing to hope now."

"Silence," Dona Helena said, quietly. "I hear the sound of footsteps in the walk leading to this arbor. Some one is coming. So we must not let ourselves be surprised."

In fact, almost at the same moment the lay sister, who had already

informed the Mother Superior of the arrival of Don Serapio de la Ronda, appeared at the entrance of the arbor.

"Señorita," she said, addressing Dona Helena, "our holy mother abbess wishes to speak to you as well as to Dona Anita without delay. She is waiting for you in her private cell in the company of a holy Franciscan monk."

The maidens exchanged a glance, and a transient flush appeared on Dona Anita's pale cheeks.

"We will follow you, sister," Dona Helena replied. The maidens rose; Dona Helena passed her arm through her companion's, and stooping down, whispered in her ear—

"Courage, Querida."

They followed the lay sister, who led them to the Mother Superior's cell, and discreetly withdrew on reaching the door. The abbess appeared to be talking rather excitedly with the Franciscan monk; but, on seeing the two girls, she ceased speaking, and rose.

"Come, my child," she said, as she held out her arms to Dona Anita, "come and thank God who, in his infinite goodness, has deigned to perform a miracle on your behalf."

The maiden stopped through involuntary emotion, and looked wildly around her. At a sign from the abbess the monk rose, and throwing back his hood at the same time as he fell on his knees before the maiden, he said to her in a voice faltering with emotion—

"Anita, do you recognize me?"

At the sound of this voice, whose sympathetic notes made all the fibres of her heart vibrate, the maiden suddenly drew herself back, tottered and fell into the arms of Dona Helena, as she shrieked with an accent impossible to describe—

"Martial! oh, Martial?"

A sob burst from her overcharged bosom, and she burst into tears. She was saved, since the immense joy she so suddenly experienced had not killed her. The Tigrero, as weak as the woman he loved, could only find tears to express all his feelings.

For some minutes the abbess and Dona Helena trembled lest these two beings, already so tried by misfortune, would not find within themselves the necessary strength to resist so terrible an emotion; but a powerful re-action suddenly took place in the tiger-slayer's mind; he sprang up at one leap, and seized in his arms the maiden, who, on her side, was making efforts to rush to him—

"Anita, dear Anita," he cried, "I have found you again at last; oh, now no human power will be able to separate us!"

"Never, never!" she murmured, as she let her head fall on the young man's shoulder; "Martial, my beloved Martial, protect me, save me!"

"Oh, yes, I will save you; angel of my life," he exclaimed, looking up defiantly to heaven; "we will be united, I swear it to you."

"Is that the prudence you promised me?" the abbess said, interposing; "remember the perils of every description that surround you, and the implacable foes who have sworn your destruction; lock up in your heart these feelings which, if revealed before one of the countless spies who watch you, would cause your death and that, perhaps, of the poor girl you love."

"Thank you, madam," the Tigrero replied; "thank you for having reminded me of the part I must play for a few days longer. If I forgot it for a few seconds, subdued by the passion that devours my

heart, I will henceforth adhere to it carefully. Do not fear lest I should imperil the happiness that is preparing for me; no, I will restrain my feelings, and let myself be guided by the counsel of the sincere friends to whom I owe the moments of ineffable happiness I am now enjoying."

"Oh! I now understand," Dona Anita exclaimed, "the mysterious hints given me. Alas! misfortune made me suspicious; so forgive me, heaven, forgive me, holy mother, and you too, Helena, my kind and faithful friend. I did not dare hope, and feared a snare."

"I forgive you, my poor child," the abbess answered; "who could blame you?"

Dona Helena pressed her friend to her heart without saying a word.

"Oh, now our misfortunes are at an end, Anita," the Tigrero exclaimed, passionately; "we have friends who will not abandon us in the supreme struggle we are engaging in with our common enemy. God, who has hitherto done every thing for us, will not leave his work incomplete; have faith in Him, my beloved."

"Martial," the maiden replied with a firmness that astonished her hearers, "I was weak because I was alone, but now that I know you live, and are near me to support me, oh! if I were to fall dead at the feet of my persecutor, I would not be false to the oath I took to be yours alone. Believing you dead, I remained faithful to your memory; but now, if persecution assailed me, I should find the strength to endure it."

This scene would have been prolonged, but prudence urged that the abbess should break it off as soon as possible. Dona Anita, rendered strong merely by the nervous excitement which possessed her, soon

felt faint; she could scarcely stand, and Don Martial himself felt his energy abandoning him.

The separation was painful between these two beings so miraculously re-united when they never expected to see each other again; but it was soothed by the hope of soon meeting again under the protection of the Mother Superior, who had done so much for them, and whose inexhaustible kindness they had entirely gained for their cause.

For the first time since she had entered the convent, Dona Anita smiled through her tears, as she offered up to heaven her nightly prayers. Don Martial went off rapidly to tell Valentine of what had taken place at this interview, which he had so long desired. Dona Helena, however, retired pensively to her cell; the maiden was dreaming—of what?

No one could have said, and probably she herself was ignorant; but, for some days past, an obtrusive thought unnecessarily occupied her mind, and constantly troubled the calm mirror in which her virgin thoughts were reflected.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE STRUGGLE.

AMBITION is the most terrible and deceptious of all human passions, in the sense that it completely dries up the heart, and can never be satisfied.

General Don Sebastian Guerrero was not one of those coldly cruel men, solely governed by the instinct of art, or whom the smell of blood intoxicates; but, with the implacable logic of ambitious persons, he went

direct to his object, overthrowing, without regret or remorse, all the obstacles that barred his way to the object he had sworn to reach, even if he were compelled to wade in blood up to his knees, and trample on a pile of corpses. He only regarded men as pawns in the great game of chess he was playing, and strove to justify himself, and stifle the warnings of his terrified conscience, by the barbarous axiom employed by the ambitious in all ages and all countries, that the end justifies the means.

His secret ambition, which, on a day of pretended frankness, he had partly revealed in an interview with the Count de Prébois Crancé at Hermosillo, was not to render himself independent, but simply to be elected, by means of a well-arranged pronunciamiento, President of the Mexican Republic.

It was not through hatred that General Guerrero was so obstinately bent on destroying the count. Ambitious men, who are ever ready to sacrifice their feelings to the interests of their gloomy machinations, know neither hatred nor friendship. Hence we must seek elsewhere the cause of the judicial murder of the count which was so implacably carried out. The general feared the count, as an adversary who would constantly thwart him in Sonora, where the first meshes of the net he wished to throw over Mexico were spun—an adversary ready to oppose the execution of his plans by claiming the due performance of the articles of partnership—a performance which, in the probable event of an insurrection excited by the general, would have become impossible, by plunging the country for a lengthened period into a state of crisis and general suspension of trade, which would have been most hostile to the

success of the lofty conceptions of the noble French adventurer.*

But the count had scarce fallen on the beach of Guaymas ere the general recognized the falseness of his calculations, and the fault he had committed in sacrificing him. In fact leaving out of the question the death of his daughter, the only being for whom he retained in some corner of his heart a little of that fire which heaven illumines in all parents for their children, he found that he had exchanged a loyal and cautious adversary for an obstinate enemy—the more formidable because, caring for nothing, and having no personal ambition, he would sacrifice every thing without hesitation or calculation in behalf of the vengeance which he had solemnly vowed to obtain by any means, over the still quivering body of his friend.

This implacable enemy, whom neither seduction nor intimidation could arrest or even draw back, was Valentine Guillois.

Under these circumstances, the general committed a graver fault than his first one—a fault which was fated to have incalculable consequences for him. Being very imperfectly acquainted with Valentine Guillois, unaware of his inflexible energy of will, and ranking him in his mind with those wood-rangers, the Pariahs of civilization, who have only courage to fire, in a moment of despair, a shot from behind a tree, but whose influence was after all insignificant, he despised him.

Valentine was careful not to dissipate, by any imprudent step, his enemy's mistake, or even arouse his suspicions.

At the time of the Count de Prébois Crancé's first expedition, when all seemed to smile on him, and his

followers already saw the complete success of their bold undertaking close at hand, Valentine had been entrusted by his friend with various important operations and difficult missions to the rich rancheros and *hacienderos* of the province. Valentine had performed the duties his friend confided to him with his usual loyalty and uprightness of mind, and had been so thoroughly appreciated by the persons with whom chance had brought him into connection, that all had remained on friendly terms with him and given him unequivocal proofs of the sincerest friendship, especially upon the death of the count.

It only depended on the hunter's will to be rich, since he knew an almost inexhaustible placer; and what the wood-ranger would never have consented to for himself, for the sake of paltry gain, he did not hesitate to attempt in order to avenge his friend. Followed by Curumilla, Belhumeur, and Black Elk, and leading a *recua* of ten mules, he did what two hundred and fifty men could not have succeeded in doing. He went through Apacheria, crossed the fearful desert of sand in which the bones of the hapless companions of the Marquis de Lhorailles were bleaching, and after enduring superhuman fatigue and braving terrible dangers, he at length reached the placer. But this time he did not come to take an insignificant sum; he wanted to collect a fortune at one stroke.

The hunter returned with his ten mules laden with gold. He knew that he was beginning a struggle with a man who was enormously rich, and wished to conquer him with his own weapons. In the new world, as in the old, money is the real sinew of war, and Valentine would not imperil the success of his vengeance.

* See "Goldseekers." Same publishers.

On returning to Guaymas, he realized his fortune, and found himself, in a single day, not only one of the richest, but *the* richest private person in Mexico, although it is a country in which fortunes attain to a considerable amount. Thus the gold of the placer, which, at an earlier period had served to organize the count's expedition, and make him believe for a moment in the realization of his dreams, was about to serve in avenging him, after having indirectly caused his death.

Then began between the general and the hunter a secret and unceasing struggle, the more terrible through its hidden nature; and the general, struck without knowing whence the blows dealt his ambition came, struggled vainly, like a lion caught in a snare, while it was impossible for him to discover the obstinate enemy who hunted him down.

This man, who had hitherto succeeded in every thing—who, during the course of his long and stormy political career, had surmounted the greatest obstacles and forced his very detractors to admire the luck that constantly accompanied his wildest and rashest conceptions—suddenly saw Fortune turn her back on him with such rapidity—we may even say brutality, that scarce six weeks after the execution of the count, he was obliged to resign his office of Military Governor, and quit, almost like a fugitive, the province of Sonora, where he had so long reigned as a master, and on which his iron yoke had pressed so heavily.

This first blow, dealt the general in the midst of his ambitious aspirations, when he had only just begun to recover from the grief his daughter's death had caused him, was the more terrible because he did not know to whom he should attribute his downfall.

Still, he did not long remain in doubt. An hour before his departure from Hermosillo he received a letter in which he was informed, in the minutest details, of the oath of vengeance which had been taken against him, and of the steps taken to obtain his recall. This letter was signed “Valentine Guillois.” The hunter, despising darkness and mystery, tore down the veil that covered him, and openly challenged his foe by manfully telling him to be on his guard.

On receiving this threatening declaration of war, the general fell into an extraordinary passion, the more terrible because it was impotent, and then, when his mind became calm again, and he began reflecting, he felt frightened. In truth the man who stood so boldly before him as an enemy, must be very powerful and certain of success thus to dare and defy him.

His departure from Sonora was a disgraceful flight, in which he tried, by craft and caution, to throw out his enemy; but the meeting at the Fort of the Chichimèques, a meeting long prepared by the hunter, proved to him that he was unmasked once again, and conquered by his enemy.

The contemptuous manner in which Valentine dismissed him after his stormy explanation with him, had internally filled the general with terror. What sinister projects could the man be meditating, what private vengeance was he arranging, that, when he held him quivering in his grasp, he allowed his foe to escape, and refused to kill him, when that would have been so easy? what torture more terrible than death did he intend to inflict on him?

The remainder of his journey across the Rocky Mountains, as far as Mexico, was one protracted agony,

during which, suffering from constant apprehension, and extreme nervous excitement, his diseased imagination inflicted on him moral torture in the stead of which any physical pain would have been welcome.

The loss of his daughter's corpse, and above all, the death of his father's old comrade in arms, the only man in whom he put faith, and who possessed his entire confidence, destroyed his energy, and for several days he was so overwhelmed by this double misfortune, that he longed for death.

His punishment was beginning. But General Guerrero was one of those powerful athletes who do not allow themselves to be overcome so easily; they may totter in the struggle, and roll on the sand of the arena, but they always rise again more terrible and menacing than before. His revolted pride restored his expiring courage; and since an implacable warfare was declared against him, he swore that he would fight to the end, whatever the consequences for him might be.

Moreover two months had elapsed since his arrival in Mexico, and his enemy had not revealed his presence by one of those terrible blows which burst like a clap of thunder above his head. The general gradually began supposing that the hunter had only wished to force him to abandon Sonora, and that, in despair of carrying out his plans advantageously in a city like Mexico, he was prudently keeping aloof, and if he had not completely renounced his vengeance, circumstances at any rate, independent of his will, compelled him to defer it.

The general, so soon as he was settled in the capital of Mexico, organized a large band of highly paid spies, who had orders to be con-

stantly on the watch, and inform him of Valentine's arrival in the city. Thus reassured by the reports of his agents he continued with feverish ardor the execution of his dark designs, for he felt convinced that if he succeeded in attaining his coveted object, the hatred of the man who pursued him would no longer be dangerous. This was the more probable, because, so soon as he held the power in his own hands, he would easily succeed in getting rid of an enemy, whom his position as a foreigner isolated, and rendered an object of dislike to the populace.

The general lived in a large house in the Calle de Tacuba; it was built by one of his ancestors, and considered one of the handsomest in the capital. We will describe in a few words the architecture of Mexico, for, as all the houses are built on the same pattern, or nearly so, by knowing one it is easy to form an idea of what the others must be.

The Mexican architecture greatly resembles the Arabic, and as for the mode of arranging the rooms, it is still entirely in its infancy; but since the Proclamation of the Independence, foreign architects have succeeded in most of the great towns, in opening side doors in the suites of rooms, which formerly only communicated with one another, and hence compelled you to go through a bed-room to enter a dining-room, or pass through a kitchen to reach the drawing-room.

The general's house was composed of four buildings, two stories in height, and with terraced roofs. Two courts separated these buildings, and an awning stretched over the four sides of the first yard, enabling visitors to reach the wide stone steps dry-footed. At the top of this flight, a handsome covered gallery, adorned with vases of flowers and

exotic shrubs, led to a vast ante-room, which opened into a splendid reception hall; after this came a considerable number of apartments, splendidly furnished in the European style.

The general only inhabited the first floor of his mansion. Although most of the streets are paved at the present day, and the canals have entirely disappeared, except in the lower districts of the city, water is still found a few inches below the surface, which produces such damp, that the ground-floor, rendered uninhabitable, is given up to stores and shops in nearly all the houses. The ground-floor of the main building, looking on the Calle de Tacuba, was, therefore, occupied by brilliant shops, which rendered the façade of the general's house even more striking.

The paintings and the ornaments carved on the walls, after the Spanish fashion, gave it a peculiar, but not unpleasant appearance, which was completed by the profusion of shrubs that lined the terrace, and converted it into a hanging garden like those of Babylon, some sixty feet above the ground. By-the-by, these gardens, from which the cupolas of the churches seem to emerge, give a really fairy-like aspect to the city, when you survey it, in a glowing sunset, from the cathedral towers.

Seven or eight days had elapsed since the events we recorded in our last chapter. General Guerrero, after a long conversation with Colonel Don Jaime Lupo, Don Sirven, and two or three others of his most faithful partisans—a conversation, in which the final arrangements were made for the pronunciamiento which was to be attempted immediately—gave audience to two of his spies, who assured him that the person, whose movements they were

ordered to watch, had not yet arrived in Mexico.

When the hour for going to the theatre arrived, the general, temporarily freed from alarm, prepared to be present at an extraordinary performance to be given, that same night, at the Santa Anna theatre; but at the moment when he was about to give orders for his carriage to be brought up, the door of the room, in which he was sitting, opened, and a footman appeared on the threshold, with a respectful bow.

"What do you want?" the general asked, turning round at the sound.

"Excellency," the valet replied, "a caballero desires a few minutes' conversation with your excellency."

"At this hour?" the general said, looking at a clock, "it is impossible;" but, suddenly reflecting, he asked, "any one you know, Isidro?"

"No, excellency; it is a caballero whom I have not yet had the honor of seeing in the house."

"Hum," said the general, shaking his head thoughtfully, "is he a gentleman?"

"That I can assure your excellency; and he told me that he had a most important communication to make to you."

In the general's present position, as head of a conspiracy on the point of breaking out, no detail must be neglected, no communication despised, so, after reflecting a little, he continued—

"You ought to have told the gentleman that I could not receive him so late, and that he had better call again to-morrow."

"I told him so, excellency."

"And he insisted?"

"Several times, excellency."

"Well, do you know his name, at least?"

"When I asked the caballero for it, he said it was useless, as you

would not know it; but if you wished to learn it, he would himself tell it to your excellency."

"What a strange person," the general muttered to himself; "very good," he then added aloud, "lead the gentleman to the small mirror room, and I will be with him immediately."

The footman bowed respectfully.

"Who can the man be, and what is the important matter he has to tell me?" the general muttered, as he was alone. "Hum, probably some poor devil mixed up in our conspiracy, who wants a little money. Well, he had better be careful, for I am not the man to be plundered with impunity, and so he will find out, if his communication is not serious."

And, throwing on to a chair the plumed hat he held in his hand, he proceeded to the mirror room.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A VISIT.

THE mirror room was an immense apartment, only separated from the covered gallery by two anterooms. It was furnished with princely luxury, and it was here that the general gave those sumptuous *tertulias*, which are still talked about in the highest Mexican circles, although so many years have elapsed.

This room, merely lighted by two lamps, standing on a console, was at this moment plunged into a semi-obscurity, when compared with the other apartments in the mansion, which were full of light.

A gentleman, dressed in full

black, and with the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor carelessly knotted in a button-hole of his coat, was leaning his elbow on the console where the lamps stood, and seemed so lost in thought, that, when the general entered the room, the sound of his steps, half subdued by the petates, did not reach the visitor's ears, and he did not turn to receive him.

Don Sebastian, after closing the door behind him, walked towards his visitor, attempting to recognize him, which, however, the stranger's position rendered temporarily impossible. It was not till he came almost near enough to touch him that the stranger, at length warned of the general's presence, raised his head; in spite of all the command Don Sebastian had over himself, he started and fell back a couple of yards on recognizing him.

"Don Valentine!" he said in a stifled voice, "you here?"

"Myself, general," he replied, with an almost imperceptible smile and a profound bow; "did you not expect a visit from me?"

The Trail-hunter, according to his habit, at once assumed his position before his adversary. A bitter smile played round the general's pale lips, and mastering his emotion, he replied sarcastically—

"Certainly, caballero, I hoped to receive a visit from you; but not here, and under such conditions, I did not venture, I confess, to anticipate such an honor."

"I am delighted," he replied, with another bow, "that I have thus anticipated your wishes."

"I will prove to you, señor," the general said with set teeth, "the value I attach to the visit you have been pleased to pay me."

While saying this, he stretched out his arm towards a bell.

"I beg your pardon, general," the Frenchman said, with imperturbable coolness, "but I believe that you intend to summon some of your people?"

"And supposing that was my intention, senor?" the general said, haughtily.

"If it were so," he replied, with icy politeness, "I think it would be better for you to do nothing of the sort."

"Oh, indeed, and for what reason, may I ask?"

"For the simple reason, general, that as I have the honor to know you thoroughly, I was not such a fool as to place myself in your power. My carriage is waiting at this moment in front of your door; in that carriage are two of my friends, and, in all probability, if they do not see me come down the steps again in half an hour, they will not hesitate to ask you what has taken place between us, and what has become of me."

The general bit his lips.

"You are mistaken as to my intentions, senor," he said. "I fear you no more than you appear to do me. I am a gentleman, and were you ten times more my enemy than you are, I would never attempt to free myself from you by an assassination."

"Be it so, general; I should be glad to be mistaken, and in that case I beg you to accept my apologies; moreover, in coming thus to see you, I give you, I believe, a proof of confidence."

"For which I thank you, senor; but as I suppose that reasons of the highest gravity alone induced you to present yourself here, and the interview you ask of me must be long, I wished to give my people orders to take out the horses, and take care that we are not interrupted."

Valentine bowed without replying, but with an imperceptible smile, and leaning again on the console, he twisted his long, fair, light moustache, while the general rang the bell. A servant came in.

"Have the horses taken out," the general said, "and I am not at home to anybody."

The servant bowed, and prepared to leave the room.

"Ah!" said the general, suddenly stopping him, "on the part of this caballero ask the gentlemen in his carriage to do me the honor of coming up to my apartments, where they can await more comfortably the end of a conversation which will probably be rather prolonged. You will serve refreshments to these gentlemen in the blue room," he added, looking fixedly at the Frenchman, "the one that follows this room."

The servant retired.

"If you still apprehend a trap, senor," he continued, turning to the Frenchman, "your friends will be at hand, if necessary, to come to your help."

"I knew that you were brave to rashness, general," the Frenchman answered politely, "and I am happy to see that you are no less honorable."

"And now, senor, be kind enough to sit down," Don Sebastian said, pointing to a chair. "May I venture to offer you any refreshments?"

"General," Valentine answered, as he seated himself, "permit me, for the present, to decline them. In my youth I served in Africa, and in that country people are only wont to break their fast with friends. As we are, temporarily at least, enemies, I must ask you to let me retain my present position toward you."

"The custom to which you allude, senor, is also met with on our prairies," the general replied; "still people sometimes depart from it. However, act as you think proper. I wait till it may please you to explain the purpose of this visit, at which I have a right to feel surprised."

"I will not abuse your patience any longer, general," he replied with a bow. "I have merely come to propose a bargain."

"A bargain?" Don Sebastian exclaimed with surprise, "I do not understand you."

"I will have the honor of explaining myself, senor."

The general bowed and said, "I await your pleasure."

"You are a diplomatist, general," Valentine continued, "and in that capacity are, doubtless, aware that a bad treaty is better than a good war."

"In certain cases I allow it is so; but I will take the liberty of remarking that, under present circumstances, senor, I must await your propositions, instead of offering any of mine, as the war, to employ your own expression, was not begun by me, but by you."

"I think it will be better not to discuss that point, in which we should find it difficult to agree; still, in order to remove any ambiguity, and lay down the point at issue distinctly, I will remind you, in a few words, of the motives which produced the hatred that divides us."

"Those motives, senor, you have already explained to me most fully at the Fort of the Chichimèques. Without discussing their validity with you, I will content myself with saying that hatred, like friendship, being a matter of sympathy, and not the result of reason, it is better to confess frankly that we hate or love each other, without trying to

account for either of these feelings, which I consider completely beyond the will."

"You are at liberty to think so, senor, and though I do not agree with you, I will not discuss the point; it is, however, certain that the hatred we bear each other is implacable, and cannot possibly be extinguished."

"Still you spoke only a minute back of a bargain."

"Certainly; but bargaining is not forgetting. I can, for certain reasons, abstain from that hatred without renouncing it; and though I may cease to injure you, I do not, on that account, contract the slightest friendship with you."

"I admit that in principle, senor; let us, therefore, come to facts without further delay; be good enough to explain to me the nature of the bargain which you think proper to propose to me to-day."

"Allow me, in the first place, according to my notions of honor, to explain to you what our position to each other is."

"Since the beginning of this interview, senor, I must confess that you have been talking enigmas inexplicable to me."

"I will try to be clear, senor, and if I tell you what your plans are, and the means you have employed for their realization, you will understand, I have no doubt, that I have succeeded in countermiming them sufficiently to prevent a favorable issue."

"Go on, senor," the general remarked, with a smile.

"In two words, this is your position. In the first, you wish, by a pronunciamiento, to overthrow General R—, and have yourself proclaimed President of the Republic in his place."

"Ah, ah," said the general, with

a forced laugh; "you must know, senor, that in our blessed country this ambition is constantly attributed to all officers who, either on account of their fortune or personal merit, hold a public position. This accusation, therefore, is not very serious."

"It would not be so, if you limited yourself to mere wishes, possibly legitimate in the present state of the country; but, unfortunately, it is not so."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, general, that you are the head of a conspiracy; that this conspiracy, several times already a failure in Sonora, you have renewed in Mexico, under almost infallible conditions of success, and which, in my opinion, would succeed, had I not resolved on causing them to fail. I mean that, only a few days ago, your conspirators assembled in a velorio kept by a certain No Lusacho. Through the agency of Don Jaime Lupo, you divided among them two bags of gold, brought by you for them, and emptied in your presence. I mean that, after this distribution, the final arrangements were made, and the day was almost fixed for the pronunciamiento. Am I deceived, general, or do you now see that I am well informed, and that my spies are quite equal to yours, who were not even able to inform you of my arrival at the Ciudad, where I have been for more than a week, and you have not known a word about it?"

While Valentine was speaking thus, in his mocking way, with his elbow carelessly laid on the arm of his chair, and his body slightly bent forward, the general was in a state of passion which he tried in vain to repress, his pale face assumed a cadaverous hue, his eyebrows met, and his clenched teeth found difficulty in keeping the words back

which tried each moment to burst forth. When the Frenchman ceased speaking, he made a violent effort to check his rage which was on the point of breaking out, and he answered in a hollow voice which emotion caused involuntarily to tremble—

"I will imitate your frankness, senor. Of what use would it be to dissimulate with an enemy so well informed as you pretend to be? What you have said about a conspiracy is perfectly correct. Yes, I intend to make a pronunciamiento, and that shortly. You see that I do not attempt to conceal any thing from you."

"I presume, because you consider it useless," Valentine answered, sarcastically.

"Perhaps so, senor. Although you are so well informed, you do not know every thing."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"What is the thing I am ignorant of?"

"That you will not leave this house again, and that I am going to blow out your brains," the general exclaimed, as he started up and cocked a pistol.

The Frenchman did not make the slightest movement to prevent the execution of the general's threat; he contented himself with looking firmly at him, and saying, coldly—

"I defy you."

Don Sebastian remained motionless, with haggard eye, pale brow, and trembling hand; then, in a few seconds, he uncocked the pistol, and fell back utterly crushed in his chair.

"You have gone too far or not far enough, caballero," Valentine went on with perfect calmness. "Every threat should be executed at all risks so soon as it is made.

You have reflected, so let us say no more about it, but resume our conversation."

In a discussion of this nature all the advantage is on the side of the adversary who retains his coolness. The general, ashamed of the passionate impulse to which he had yielded, and crushed by his enemy's sarcastically contemptuous answer, remained dumb; he at length understood that, with a man like the one before him, any contest must turn to his disadvantage, unless he employed treachery, which his pride forbade.

"Let us, for the present," Valentine went on, still calmly and coldly, "leave this conspiracy, to which we will revert presently, and pass to a no less interesting subject. If I am correctly informed, Senor Don Sebastian, you have a ward of the name of Dona Anita de Torrès?"

The general started, but remained silent.

"Now," continued Valentine, "in consequence of a frightful catastrophe, this young lady became insane. But that does not prevent you from insisting on marrying her, in contempt of all law, divine and human, for the simple reason that she is enormously rich and you require her fortune for the execution of your ambitious plans. It is true that the young lady does not love you, and never did love you; it is also true that her father intended her for another, and that other you insist on declaring to be dead, although he is alive; but what do you care for that? Unfortunately, one of my intimate friends, of whom you probably never heard, Senor Don Serapio de la Ronda, has heard this affair alluded to. I will tell you confidentially that Don Serapio is greatly respected by certain parties, and has very considerable power.

Don Serapio, I know not why, takes an interest in Dona Anita, and has made up his mind, whether you like it or not, to marry her to the man she loves, and for whom her father intended her."

"The villian is dead," the general exclaimed, furiously.

"You are perfectly well aware of the contrary," Senor Valentine answered, "and to remove any doubts you may still happen to have, I will give you the proof. Don Martial," he said aloud, "come in, pray, and tell General Guerrero yourself that you are not dead."

"Oh!" the general muttered furiously, "this man is a demon."

At this moment the door opened, and a new personage entered the room.

CHAPTER XIX.

ASSISTANCE.

THE man who now entered the hall of mirrors was dressed like the riders who promenade at the Bucarelli, and gallop at carriage doors—that is to say, in trousers with silk stripes down the sides, and a broad-brimmed hat decorated with a double gold string and tassels.

He walked gracefully up to Don Sebastian, still holding his hat in his right hand, bowed to him with that exquisite grace of which the Mexicans alone seem to have the privilege, and thrusting his hand into his side, he said, with an accent of cutting sarcasm, and in a harsh, metallic voice—

"Do you recognize me, Don Sebastian, and do you believe that I am really alive, and that it is not the ghost of Martial the Tigrero

which has come from the grave to address you?"

At the same moment Belhumeur's clever, knowing face could be seen peering through the doorway. With his eyes obstinately fixed on the general, he seemed to be impatiently expecting an answer, which the latter, struggling with several different feelings, evidently hesitated to give. Still, he was compelled to form a resolution, so he rose and looked the Tigrero boldly in the face.

"Who are you, *senor*?" he said, in a firm voice, "and by what right do you question me?"

"Well played," said Valentine, with a laugh; "by heaven, caballero, it is a pleasure to contend with you, for, on my soul, you are a rude adversary."

"Do you think so?" Don Sebastian asked, with a hoarse laugh.

"Certainly," the hunter continued, "and I am delighted to bear my testimony to the fact; hence you had better yield at once, for you are in a dilemma from which you cannot escape, not even by a master stroke."

There was a silence, lasting some minutes. At length the general seemed to make up his mind, for he turned to Belhumeur, who was still listening, and bowed to him with ironical politeness.

"Why stand half hidden by that door?" he said to him; "pray enter, caballero, for your presence here will be most agreeable to the whole company."

The Canadian at once entered, and after giving the general a respectful bow he leant over the back of Valentine's chair. The latter eagerly followed all the incidents of the strange scene that was being played before him, and in which he appeared to be a disinterested spectator rather than an actor.

"You see, *senores*," the general said, haughtily, "that I imitate your example, and, like you, play fairly. I believe that you entered my house in order to propose a bargain to me, Don Valentine? You, *senor*," he said, turning to the Tigrero, "whom I told that I did not recognize, and whom I have the honor of receiving at my house for the first time, have doubtless come as witness for these caballeros, who are your friends. Well, gentlemen, you shall all three be satisfied. I am awaiting your proposal, Don Valentine. I allow, *senor*, that you, whose miraculous resuscitation I have hitherto denied, are alive, and are really Don Martial, the ex-lover of Dona Anita de Torrès. As for you, *senor*, whom I do not know, I authorize you to declare before any one you like the truth of the words I utter. Are you all three satisfied, gentlemen? Is there any thing else I can do to afford you pleasure?—if so, speak, and I am ready to satisfy you."

"A man could not yield to what is inevitable with better grace," Valentine replied, bowing ironically.

"Thanks for approval, caballero, and be kind enough to let me know, without further delay, the conditions on which you are willing to leave off pursuing me with that terrible hatred with which you incessantly threaten me, and whose result is rather long in coming, according to my judgment."

These words were uttered with a mixture of pride and contempt impossible to express, and which for a moment rendered Valentine dumb, so extraordinary did the sudden change in his adversary's humor appear to him.

"I am waiting," the general added, as he fell back in his chair, with an air of weariness.

"We will bring matters to an

end," Valentine said, drawing himself up with an air of resolution.

"That is what I wish," the general interrupted him, as he lit a cigarette, which he began smoking with a most profound coolness.

"These are my conditions," the hunter said distinctly and harshly, for he was annoyed by this frigid indifference. "You will at once leave Mexico, and give up Dona Anita, to whom you will not only restore her liberty, but also the right of giving her hand and fortune to whomsoever she pleases. You will sell your estates, and retire to the United States, promising on oath never to return to Mexico. On my side, I pledge myself to restore you your daughter's body, and never attempt to injure you in any way."

"Have you any thing more to add?" the general asked, as he coolly watched the blue smoke of his cigarette as it rose in circles to the ceiling.

"Nothing; but take care, señor, I too have taken an oath, and from what I have told you, you must have seen how far I have detected your secrets. Accept or refuse, but come to a decision; for this is the last time we shall meet face to face under the like conditions. The game we are playing is a terrible one, and must end in the death of one of us; and I shall show you no pity, as, doubtless, you will show me none. Reflect seriously before answering yes or no, and I give you half an hour to decide."

The general burst into a sharp and nervous laugh. "Viva *Dios*, caballero!" he exclaimed, with a contemptuous toss of his head, "I have listened to you with extreme surprise. You dispose of my will with an incomparable facility. I do not know who gives you the right to speak and act as you are doing;

but, by heaven, hatred, however active it may be, can in no case possess this privilege. You fancy yourself much more powerful than you really are, I fancy; but, at any rate, whatever may happen, bear this carefully in mind—I will not retreat an inch before you. Accepting your impudent and ridiculous conditions would be to cover myself with shame and my utter ruin. Were you the genius of evil clothed in mortal form, I would not the less persist in the track I have laid down for myself, and in which I will persevere at my own risk and peril; however terrible may be the obstacles you raise, I will overthrow them or succumb bravely, buried beneath the ruins of my abortive plans and my destroyed fortunes. Hence consider yourself warned, Don Valentine; that I despise your menaces, and they will not stop me. And you, Don Martial, since such is your name, that I shall marry my ward, in spite of the efforts you may make to prevent me, and shall do so because I wish it, and because no man in the world has ever attempted to resist my will without being at once mercilessly crushed. And now, señores, as we have said all we have to say to each other, and I think there is no more, and we can have no doubt as to our mutual intentions, permit me to take leave of you, for I wish to go to the Santa Anna theatre, and it is already very late."

He rang the bell and a footman came in.

"Order the carriage," he said to him.

"Then," Valentine said as he rose, "it is war to the death between us."

"War to the death! be it so."

"We shall only meet once again, general," the hunter remarked; "and that will be on the eve of your death, when you are in Capilla."

"I accept the meeting, and will

bow uncomplainingly before you if you are powerful enough to obtain that result; but, believe me, I am not there yet."

"You are nearer your fall than you perhaps suppose."

"That is possible; but enough of this; any further conversation will be useless. Light these gentlemen down," he said to the servant, who at this moment entered the room.

The three men rose, exchanged dumb bows with the general, and accompanied by him to the door of the room, they followed the footman, who preceded them with candles. Two carriages were waiting at the foot of the stairs; Valentine and his friends got into one of them, the general took his seat in the other, and they heard him give the order in a firm voice to drive to the Santa Anna theatre. The coachmen flogged their horses, which started at a gallop, and the two carriages left the house, the gates of which were closed after them.

The Santa Anna theatre was built in 1844, by the Spanish architect, Hidalgo. This building has externally nothing remarkable about it, either in regard to frontage or position; but we are glad to state that the interior is convenient, elegant, and even grand.

After passing through the external portico, you enter a yard covered with a glass dome, next come wide stairs with low steps, large and lofty lobbies, a double row of galleries looking on the front yard, and airy crush-rooms for the promenaders.

The house is well built, well decorated, and spacious; it has three rows of boxes, with a lower circle representing the pit boxes, and another above the third circle for the lower classes. In the pit, it is worth mentioning, that each visitor has his stall, which he reaches easily

and comfortably by passages formed down the centre and round the theatre. The boxes nearly all contain ten persons, and are separated from each other by light colonnades and partitions. To each box is attached a room, to which people withdraw between the acts, and, instead of the balconies which in our theatres conceal a great part of the ladies' toilettes, the boxes have only a ledge a few inches in height, which allows the splendid dresses of the audience to be fully admired.

We have dwelt, perhaps with a little complacency, on this description of the Santa Anna theatre, for we thought that, at the moment when it is intended to rebuild the Opera and other Parisian theatres, there can be no harm in displaying the difference that exists between the frightful dens in which the spectators are thrust together pell-mell every night in a city like Paris, which claims to be the first, not only in Europe, but in the whole world, and the spacious airy theatres of a country like Mexico, which in so many respects is inferior to us as regards ideas of civilization and comfort. It would, however, be very easy, we fancy, to obtain in Paris the advantageous results the Mexicans have enjoyed for twenty years, and that at a slight expense. Unfortunately, whatever may be said, the French are the most thorough routine nation in the world, and we greatly fear that, in spite of incessant protests, things will remain for a long time in the same state as they are to-day.

When the general entered his box, which was in the first circle, and almost facing the stage, the house presented a truly fairy-like appearance. The extraordinary performance had brought an immense throng of spectators and ladies, whose magnificent dresses were covered with diamonds,

which glittered and flashed beneath the light that played on them.

Don Sebastian, after bending forward for a moment to exchange bows with his numerous acquaintances, and prove his presence, withdrew to the back of the box, opened his glasses, and began looking carelessly about him. But though, through a powerful effort of the will, his face was cold, calm, and unmoved, a terrible storm was raging in the general's heart.

The scene that had taken place a few minutes previously at his mansion, had filled him with anxiety and gloomy forebodings, for he understood that his adversaries must either believe or feel themselves very strong thus to dare and defy him to the face, and audaciously enter his very house. In vain he tortured his mind to find means to get rid of his obstinate enemy; but time pressed, his situation became at each moment more critical, and unless some bold and desperate stroke proved successful, he felt instinctively that he was lost without chance of salvation.

The president's box was occupied by the first magistrate of the Republic and some of his aides-de-camp. Several times, Don Sebastian fancied that the president's eyes were fixed on him with a strange expression, after which he bent over and whispered some remarks to the gentlemen who accompanied him. Perhaps this was not real, and the general's pricked conscience suggested to him suspicions far from the thoughts of those against whom he had so many reasons to be on his guard; but whether real or not, these suspicions tortured his heart and proved to him the necessity of coming to an end at all risks.

Still the performance went on; the curtain had just fallen before the

last act, and the general, devoured by anxiety, and persuaded that he had remained long enough in the theatre to testify his presence, was preparing to retire; when the door of his box opened, and Colonel Lupo walked in.

"Ah, is it you, colonel?" Don Sebastian said to him as he offered his hand and gave him a forced smile. "You are welcome; I did not hope any longer to have the pleasure of seeing you, and I was just going away."

"Pray do not let me stop you, general, I have only a few words to say to you."

"Our business?"

"Goes on famously."

"No suspicion?"

"Not the shadow."

The general breathed like a man from whose chest a crushing weight has just been removed.

"Can I be of any service to you?" he said, absently.

"For the present, I have only come for your sake."

"How so?"

"I was accosted to-day by a leper, a villain of the worst sort, who says he wishes to avenge himself on a certain Frenchman, whom he declares you know, and he desires to place himself under your protection, in the event of the blade of his navaja accidentally slipping into his enemy's body."

"Hum! that is serious," the general said with an imperceptible start. "I do not know how far I dare go in being bail for such a scoundrel."

"He declares that you have known him for a long time, and that while doing his own business, he will be doing yours."

"You know that I am no admirer of navajadas, for an assassination always injures the character of a politician."

"That is true; but you cannot be rendered responsible for the crimes any villain may think proper to commit."

"Did this worthy gentleman tell you his name, my dear colonel?"

"Yes; but I believe it would be better to mention it in the open air, rather than in this place."

"One word more; have you cleverly deceived him, and do you think that he really intends to be useful to us?"

"Useful to you, you mean."

"As you please."

"I could almost assert it."

"Well, we will be off; have you weapons about you?"

"I should think so; it would be madness to go about Mexico unarmed."

"I have pistols in my pocket, so I will dismiss my carriage, and we will walk home to my house; does that suit you, my dear colonel?"

"Excellently, general, the more so because if you evince any desire to see the scoundrel in question, nothing will be easier than for me to take you to the den he occupies, without attracting attention."

The general looked at his accomplice fixedly. "You have not told me all, colonel?" he said.

"I have not, general, but I am convinced that you understand the motive which at this moment keeps my mouth shut."

"In that case let us be off."

He wrapped himself in his cloak and left the box, followed by the colonel. A footman was waiting under the portico for his orders to bring up the carriage.

"Return to the house," the general said; "it is a fine night and I feel inclined for a walk."

The footman retired.

"Come, colonel," Don Sebastian went on.

They left the theatre and proceeded slowly towards the Portales de Mercadores, which were entirely deserted at this advanced hour of the night.

CHAPTER XX.

EL ZARAGATE.

THE night was clear, mild and starry, a profound calm prevailed in the deserted streets, and it was in fact one of those delicious Mexican nights, so filled with soft emanations, and which dispose the mind to delicious reveries.

The two gentlemen, carefully wrapped in their cloaks, walked side by side, along the middle of the street in fear of an ambuscade, examining with practised eyes the doorways and the dark corners of side streets. When they were far enough from the theatre no longer to fear indiscreet eyes or ears, the general at length broke the silence.

"Now, Señor Don Jaime," he said, "let us speak frankly, if you please."

"I wish for nothing better," the colonel replied, with a bow.

"And to begin," Don Sebastian continued, "tell me who the man is from whom you hinted that I could derive some benefit."

"Nothing is easier, excellency. This man is a villain of the worst sort, as I already had the honor of telling you; his antecedents are, I suppose, rather dark, and that is all I have been able to discover. This man, who, I believe, belongs to no country, but who, in consequence of his adventurous life, has visited them all and speaks all languages, was at San Francisco when the

Count de Prébois Crancé organized the cuadrilla of bandits, at the head of which he undertook to dismember our lovely country, and in which, between ourselves, he would probably have succeeded had it not been for your skill and courage."

"We will pass over that, my dear colonel," the general quickly interrupted him; "I did my duty in that affair, as I shall always do it when the interest of my country is at stake."

The colonel bowed.

"Well," he continued, "the villain I am speaking of could not let such a magnificent opportunity slip; he enlisted in the count's cuadrilla. I believe he was starving at San Francisco, and, for certain reasons best known to himself, was not sorry to leave that city—but perhaps I weary you by giving you all these details."

"On the contrary, my dear colonel, I wish to be thoroughly acquainted with this picaro, in order to judge what reliance may be placed in his protestations."

"On arriving at Guaymas, our man became almost directly the secret agent of that unhappy Colonel Fleury, who, as you well remember, was so brutally assassinated by the Frenchmen."

"Alas, yes!" the general said with a sardonic smile.

"Senor Pavo also employed him several times," Don Jaime continued; "but, unfortunately for our individual, Don Valentine, the count's friend, was watching; he discovered, I knew not how, all his little tricks, and insisted on his dismissal from the company, after a quarrel he had with one of the French officers."

"I think I can remember the affair being talked about at the time. Was not this villain known by the sobriquet of the Zaragate?"

"He was, general; furious at

what happened to him, and attributing it to Don Valentine, he took an oath to kill him whenever he met him, so soon as the opportunity offered itself."

"Well?"

"It seems that, despite all his good will and his eager desire to get rid of his enemy, the opportunity has not yet offered, as he has not killed him."

"That is true; but how did you come across this scoundrel, colonel?"

"Well, general," he answered with some hesitation, "you know that I have been compelled during the last few days, for the sake of our affair, to keep rather bad company. This scoundrel came to offer his services. I cross-questioned him, and knowing your enmity to that Frenchman, I resolved to inform you of this acquisition. If I have done wrong, forgive me, and we will say no more about it."

"On the contrary, colonel," the general said eagerly. "The deuce! not only have I nothing to forgive, but I feel very grateful to you, for your confession has come at a most fortunate time. You shall judge, however, for I wish to be frank with you, the more so because, apart from the high esteem I feel for your character, our common welfare is at stake at this moment."

"You frighten me, general!"

"You will be more frightened directly; know that this Valentine, this Frenchman, this demon, has, I know not by what means, discovered our conspiracy, holds all the threads of it, and, more than that, is acquainted with all the members beginning with myself."

"*Volo a brios!*" the colonel exclaimed, with a start of surprise, and turning pale with terror, "in that case we are lost."

"Well, I confess that our chances of success are considerably diminished."

"Pardon me for asking, general," he continued in great agitation, "but in circumstances like the present——"

"Go on, go on, my dear colonel, do not be embarrassed."

"Are you sure, general, perfectly certain as to the statement you have just made to me?"

"You shall judge. About an hour before the opening of the theatre, Don Valentine himself—you understand me?—came to my house with two friends; doubtless cut-throats in his pay, and revealed all to me; what do you say to that?"

"I say that if this man does not die we are hopelessly lost."

"That is my opinion, too," the general remarked coldly.

"How came it that, in spite of this terrible revelation, you ventured to show yourself at the theatre?"

Don Sebastian smiled and shrugged his shoulders disdainfully.

"Ought I to let even indifferent persons see the anxiety that devoured me? Undeceive yourself, colonel; boldness alone can save us; do not forget that we are risking our heads at this moment."

"I am not likely to forget it."

"As for this man, the Zaragate, I must not and will not see him; but do you deal with him as you think proper. You understand that it is of the utmost importance that I should be ignorant of the arrangements you may make with him, and be able to prove, if necessary, that I had no knowledge of this. Moreover, as you are aware, I am not one for extreme measures; the sight of such a villain would be repulsive to me, for I have such a horror of bloodshed. Alas!" he added, with

a sigh, "I have been forced to shed only too much in the course of my life."

"I do not know exactly," the colonel muttered.

"I have entire confidence in you; you are an intelligent man; I give you full authority, and whatever you do will be well done. You understand me, I trust?"

"Yes, yes, general," the officer grunted ill-temperedly, "I understand you only too well."

"I see——"

"What do you see?" the other interrupted him.

"That, if we succeed, you will be a general and Governor of Sonora. That is rather a pretty prospect, I fancy, and one worth risking something for."

"It is useless to remind me of your promises, general; you are well aware that I am devoted to you."

"I know it, of course, and on that account leave you. A longer conversation in the moonlight might arouse suspicions. Good-night, and come and breakfast with me tomorrow."

"I will not fail, general. Good-night, and I kiss your excellency's hands."

The general pulled his hat over his eyes, wrapped himself in his cloak, and went off hastily towards the Calle de Tacuba. On being left alone, the colonel remained for a moment plunged in deep thought; the office with which he was intrusted, for he perfectly caught the meaning of the general's hints, was most serious. He must act vigorously without compromising his chief, and in the shortest possible period, under the penalty of being himself arrested and shot in four-and-twenty hours if he failed. For the Mexicans, like their old masters

the Spaniards, do not jest in matters connected with revolutions, and boldly cut away the evil at the root, by killing all the leaders of the abortive conspiracy.

The situation was critical, and he must make up his mind, for the slight delay might ruin all; but at so late an hour where was he to meet a man like the Zaragate, who had probably no known domicile, and who led no doubt a most irregular life.

Mexico, like all large cities, is amply endowed with suspicious houses, frequented by rogues of all ages, who are continually wandering about in search of adventures, more or less lucrative, under the complacent protection of the moon.

Moreover, although the worthy colonel had, in the course of his life, frequented very mixed company, as he himself allowed, he was not at all anxious to venture alone at night into the lower parts of the city, and enter the *velorios*, thorough cut-throat dens, filled with robbers and assassins, in which respectable persons do not even venture in bright day without a shudder.

At the moment when the colonel mechanically raised his head and looked despairingly up to heaven, he fancied he saw several suspicious shadows prowling about him in a suggestive manner. But the colonel was brave, and the more so, because he had literally nothing to lose, hence he quietly loosened his sword, opened his cloak, and at the instant when four or five fellows attacked him at once with machetes and long *navajas*, he was on guard according to all the rules of the art, with his left foot supported a pillar, and his cloak wrapped like a buckler round his arm.

The attack was a rude one, but the colonel withstood it manfully;

besides, all went on in the Mexican way, without a shout or call for help. When you are thus attacked in a Mexican street, you feel so assured of death, that you generally confine yourself to the best possible defence, without losing time in calling for help, which will certainly not arrive.

Still, the assailants being armed with short and heavy weapons, had a marked disadvantage against the colonel's long and thin rapier, which twisted like a snake, writhed round their weapons, and had already pricked two of the men sharply enough to make the others reflect, and display greater prudence in their attack. The colonel felt that they were giving ground.

"Come on, villains," he exclaimed, as he gave a terrific lunge, and ran one of the bandits right through the body, who rolled on the pavement with a yell of pain. "Let us come to an end of this, in the demon's name!"

"Stop, stop!" the man who seemed to be the leader of the bandits exclaimed; "we are mistaken."

As the bandits asked for nothing better than to stop, they retreated a few steps without hesitation.

"Yes, *Rayo di Dios*, you are mistaken, birbones," the exasperated colonel shouted.

"Can it possibly be you," the first speaker continued, "Senor Colonel Don Jaime Lupo?"

"Halloo!" the colonel said, falling back a step in surprise, "who mentioned my name?"

"I, excellency; a friend."

"A friend? a strange friend who has been trying to assassinate me for the last ten minutes."

"Believe me, colonel, that had we known whom we had to deal with, we should never have attacked you. All this is the result of a deplorable

misunderstanding, which you will, however, excuse."

"But who are you, in the demon's name?"

"What, excellency, do you not recognize the Zaragate?"

"The Zaragate!" the colonel exclaimed, with glad surprise. "Well, scoundrel, are you aware that yours is a singular trade?"

"Alas! excellency, a man must do what he can," the bandit replied, in a sorrowful voice.

"Hum! then you have turned robber at present?"

The scoundrel drew himself up with dignity.

"No, excellency. I am serving in the company of these honorable caballeros the persons who claim my help."

The honorable caballeros, seeing that the affair was going to end peacefully, had returned their knives to their belts, and seemed tolerably well satisfied at this unexpected conclusion, with the exception of the man who had received the last thrust, and surrendered his felon soul to the fiend; an acquisition, between ourselves, of no great value to the spirit of darkness.

"Can any one have requested your services against me, Senor Zaragate?" the colonel continued, as he returned his sword to its scabbard.

"Not at all, excellency. I have already had the honor of remarking that it was a mistake; we were waiting here for a young spark, who during the last week has contracted the bad habit of prowling under the window of a senator's mistress, and who asked me as a kindness to free him from this troublesome fellow."

"Caspita! Senor Zaragate, you have a rather quick way with you; and your senator appears to me

somewhat hasty. But as your little matter is probably spoiled for tonight—"

"I think, excellency, that the gallant heard the clash of steel, and took very good care not to come on."

"If he did so, he acted wisely; at any rate, if no other motive keeps you here, and you have no objection to accompany me, I shall feel obliged by your doing so, for I have to talk with you on very serious matters, and, in fact, was looking for you."

"Only see what a thing chance is!" the bandit exclaimed.

"Hum! let us hope it will not be quite so brutal next time."

The Zaragate burst into a laugh.

"Stay!" the colonel continued, as he laid a gold coin in his hand, "be good enough to give this in my name to these honorable caballeros, and beg them to forgive the rather rough way in which, at the first moment, I received their advances."

"Oh, they will not owe you a grudge, my dear sir, you may be sure of that."

The bandits, perfectly reconciled with the colonel by means of the coin, gave him tremendous bows, accompanied by offers of service, and took leave of him, after exchanging a few sentences in a whisper with their chief; then they went off to the right, while the colonel and his companion turned to the left.

"They seem to be rather determined fellows," the colonel said, in order to broach his subject.

"Perfect lions, excellency, and obedient as rastreos."

"Excellent; and have you many of that sort under your hand?"

"Nothing would be easier, in the case of need, than to make up a dozen."

"All equally true?"

"All."

"That is really valuable, do you know that, Senor Zaragate; and you are a lucky caballero!"

"Your excellency flatters me."

"On my word, no. I am expressing my honest opinion, that is all."

"Pardon me, excellency; but may I ask where we are going?"

"Have you an inclination for one direction more than another?"

"Not the slightest, excellency; still, I confess that, as a general rule, I like to know where I am going."

"Every sensible man ought to be of the same way of thinking. Well, we are going to my house; have you any objection to that?"

"None at all. I think you said, excellency, that I was a lucky man?"

"Indeed I did, and I repeat that I consider you very fortunate."

"Hum, you know the proverb, excellency, 'every one knows where the shoe pinches him.'"

"That is true, and I suppose the shoe pinches you, eh?"

"It does," he replied, with a sigh.

The colonel looked at him anxiously. "I understand the cause of your grief," he said; "and it is the worse, because there is no remedy for it."

"Do you think so?"

"Casپita! I am certain of it."

"You may be mistaken, excellency."

"Nonsense! You who so graciously place yourself at the service of those who have an insult to avenge, are forced to renounce your own vengeance."

"Oh, oh, excellency, what is that you are saying?"

"I am speaking the truth. You hate the Frenchman whom you mentioned to me to-day, but you are afraid of him."

"Afraid!" he exclaimed angrily.

"I believe so," the colonel answered coolly.

"Oh! if I only made up my mind to it——"

"Yes," the colonel remarked, with a laugh, "but you will not make up your mind because, I repeat, you are afraid; and to prove to you the truth of my assertion, although I do not know the man, and only take an interest in the matter for your sake, I will make you a wager if you like."

"A wager?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I bet you that you will not dare avenge yourself on your enemy within the next four and twenty hours, not even with the help of your twelve companions."

"And what will you bet, excellency?"

"Well, I am so certain of running no risk, that I will bet you one hundred ounces. Does that suit you?"

"One hundred ounces!" the bandit exclaimed, his eyes sparkling with greed. "Viva *Dios!* I would kill my own brother for such a sum."

"You are flattering yourself, I see."

"Here we are at your door, excellency, so it is needless for me to go any further. You said one hundred ounces, I think?"

"I did."

"Farewell. The coming day will not end before I am avenged!"

"Nonsense, nonsense! you will think better of it. Good-night, Senor Zaragate."

And the colonel entered his house, muttering to himself, in an aside, "I fancy I managed that cleverly. If this accursed Frenchman escapes from the blood-hounds I have let loose on him, he must be the demon the general calls him."

CHAPTER XXI.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW.

THE house taken for Valentine by Mr. Rallier was, as we have already stated, situated in the Calle de Tacuba, and by a strange accident, in no way premeditated, only a few yards from the mansion belonging to General Don Sebastian Guerrero. The latter had no suspicion of this, for until the moment when the hunter thought it advisable to pay him a visit, he had been completely ignorant of his enemy's presence in Mexico, in spite of the crowd of spies whom he paid to inform him of his arrival in the capital.

The hunter, therefore, would only have had a few steps to go to reach home after leaving the general. But suspecting that the latter might have given orders to have his carriage followed, he ordered his coachman to drive to the Alameda, and thence to the Paseo de Bucarelli.

As the night was far advanced, the promenaders had abandoned the shady walks of the Alameda, which was now completely deserted. This, doubtless, was what the hunter desired, for, on reaching about the centre of the drive, he ordered the coachman to stop, and got out with his companions. After recommending him to watch carefully over his mules (in Mexico people do not use horses for their carriages), and not let any one approach him, for fear of one of those surprises so frequent at this hour at this place, the three men then disappeared in one of the shady walks, though careful not to go too far, so that they could assist their coachman in case of need.

Valentine, like all men accustomed to desert life, that is to vast horizons of verdure, had an instinctive distrust of stone-walls, behind

which, in his fancy, a spy was continually listening. Hence, when he had an important affair to discuss, or a serious matter to communicate to his friends, he preferred—in spite of the care with which his house had been chosen, and the faithful friends who passed as servants there—going to the Alameda, the Paseo de Bucarelli, the Vega, or somewhere in the environs of Mexico, where, after posting Curumilla as a sentry, that is to say, the man in whom he had the most perfect faith, and whose scent, if I may be allowed the term, was infallible, he believed that he could safely confide his closest secrets to the friends he conveyed to these strange open-air councils.

On reaching a thick clump of trees, the hunter stopped.

"We shall be comfortable here," he said, as he sat down on a stone-bench and invited his friends to imitate him, "and shall be able to talk without fear."

"The trees have eyes, and the leaves ears," Belhumeur answered sententiously; "I fear nothing so much in the world as these transparent screens of verdure, which allow every thing to be seen and heard."

"Yes," Valentine remarked with a smile, "if you do not take the precaution to frighten away spies;" and at the same moment he imitated the soft cadenced hiss of the coral snake.

A similar hiss was heard from the centre of the clump and seemed like an echo.

"That is the chief's signal," the hunter said. "He has been watching for us there for nearly an hour. Do you now believe that we are in safety?"

"Certainly; when Curumilla watches over us we have no surprise to apprehend."

"Let us talk, then," said Don Martial.

"One moment," Valentine remarked, "we must first hear the report of a friend, which is most valuable, and will doubtless decide the measures we have to adopt."

"Whom are you alluding to?"

"You shall see," Valentine answered, and clapped his hands thrice softly.

Immediately a slight sound and a gentle rustling of leaves was heard in a neighboring thicket, and a man suddenly emerged, about four paces from the hunters. It was Carnero, the capataz of General Guerrero. He wore a vicuna skin hat, of which the large brim was bent over his eyes, and he was wrapped up in a spacious cloak.

"Good-evening, senores," he said, with a polite bow, "I have been awaiting your coming for nearly an hour, and almost despaired of seeing you to-night."

"We were detained longer than we expected by General Guerrero."

"Do you come from him?"

"Did I not tell you I should call on him?"

"Yes; but I hardly believed that you would have the temerity to venture so imprudently into the lion's den."

"Nonsense," Valentine said with a disdainful smile, "the lion, as you call him, I assure you, is remarkably tame; he drew in his claws completely, and received us with the most exquisite politeness."

"In that case take care," the capataz replied, with a significant shake of the head; "if he received you, as you say, and I have no reason to doubt it, he is, be assured, preparing a terrible countermine against you."

"I am of the same opinion; the

question is, whether we shall allow him the time to act."

"He is very clever, my dear Valentine," the capataz continued, "and seems to possess an intuition of evil. In spite of the oath I took to you when, on your entreaty, I consented to remain in his service, there are days when, although I possess a thorough knowledge of his character, he terrifies even me, and I feel on the point of giving up the rude task which, through devotion to you, I have imposed on myself."

"Courage, my friend; persevere but a few days longer, and, believe me, we shall be all avenged."

"May heaven grant it!" the capataz said, with a sigh; "but I confess that I dare not believe it, even though it is you who assure me of the fact."

"Have you learnt any important news since our last interview?"

"Only one thing, but I think it is of the utmost gravity for you."

"Speak, my friend."

"What I have to tell you is short and gloomy, senores. The general, after a secret conversation with his man of business, ordered me to carry a letter to the Convent of Bernardines."

"To the convent?" Don Martial exclaimed.

"Silence," said Valentine. "Do you know the contents of this letter?"

"Dona Anita gave it me to read. The general informs the abbess that he is resolved to finish the matter; that whether his ward be mad or not, he means to marry her, and that at sunrise on the day after tomorrow, a priest sent by him will present himself at the convent to arrange the ceremony."

"Great God! what is to be done?" the Tigrero exclaimed sad-

ly; "how is the execution of this odious machination to be prevented?"

"Silence," Valentine repeated. "Is that all, Carnero?"

"No; the general adds, that he requests the abbess to prepare the young lady for this union, and that he will himself call at the convent to-morrow, in order to explain more fully his inexorable wishes—these are the very words of the letter."

"Very good, my friend, I thank you for this precious information; it is of the utmost importance that the general should be prevented from going to the convent before three o'clock of the tarde. You understand, my friend, this is of vital importance, so you must manage to effect it."

"Do not be uneasy, my dear Valentine; the general shall not go to the convent before the hour you indicate, whatever may be the means I am forced to employ to prevent him."

"I count on your promise, my friend; and now good-by."

He offered him his hand, which the capataz pressed forcibly.

"When shall I see you, again?" he asked.

"I will soon let you know," the hunter answered.

The capataz bowed and went down a walk; the sound of his footsteps rapidly decreased, and was quite inaudible within a few minutes.

"My friends," Valentine then said, "we have now arrived at the moment for the final struggle, which we have so long been preparing. We must not let ourselves be led away by hatred, but act like judges, not as men who are avenging themselves. Blood demands blood, it is true, according to the law of the desert; but, remember, however culpable

the man whom we have condemned may be, his death would be an indelible spot, a brand of infamy which would sully our honor."

"But this monster," the Tigrero exclaimed, with a passion the more violent because it was repressed, "is beyond the pale of humanity."

"He may re-enter it to repent."

"Are we priests then to practise forgetfulness of insults?" Don Martial asked with a fiendish grin.

"No, my friend, there are men in the grand and sublime acceptation of the term; men who have often been faulty themselves, and who, rendered better by the life of struggling they have led, and the grief which has frequently bowed them beneath its iron yoke, inflict a chastisement, but despise vengeance, which they leave to weak and pusillanimous minds. Who of you, my friends, would dare to say that he has suffered more than I? To him alone will I concede the right of imposing his will on me, and what he bids me do I will do."

"Forgive me, my friend," the Tigrero answered, "you are ever good, ever great. God, in imposing on you a heavy task, endowed you at the same time with an energetic soul, and a heart which seems to expand in your bosom under the blast of adversity, instead of withering. We, however, are but common men, in whom the sanguinary instinct of the savage is constantly revealed in spite of all our efforts, and who know no other law save that of retaliation. Forget the senseless words my lips uttered, and be assured that I will ever joyfully obey you, whatever you may command, persuaded as I am, that you can only ask the man who has utterly placed himself in your power to do just actions."

The hunter, while his friend was

speaking thus in a voice broken by emotion, had let his head fall on his hands, and seemed absorbed in gloomy and painful thought.

"I have nothing to forgive you, my friend," he replied in a gentle, sympathizing voice, "for through my own sufferings I can understand what yours are. I, too, often feel my heart bound with wrath and indignation; for, believe me, my friend, I have a constant struggle to wage against myself, not to let myself be led away to make a vengeance of what must only be a punishment. But enough on this head; time presses, and we must arrange our plans, so as not to be foiled by our enemies. I went to-day to the palace, where I had a secret conversation with the President of the Republic, whom, as you are aware, I have known for many years, and who honors me with a friendship of which I am far from believing myself worthy. At the end of our interview he handed me a paper, a species of blank signature, by the aid of which I can do what I think advisable for the success of our plans."

"Did you obtain such a paper?"

"I have it in my pocket. Now, listen to me. You will go at sunrise to-morrow to the house of Don Antonio Rallier; he will be informed of your coming, and you will follow his instructions."

"And you?"

"Do not be anxious about my movements, good friend, and only think of your own business, for, I repeat, the decisive moment is approaching. The day after to-morrow begins the feast of the anniversary of Mexican Independence; that is to say, on that day we shall do battle with our enemy, and meet him face to face; and the combat will be a rude one; for this man has a will

of iron, and a terrible energy. We shall be able to conquer him, but not to subdue him, and if we do not take care he will slip through our hands like a serpent; hence our personal affairs must be finished to-morrow. Though apparently absent, I shall be really near you, that is to say, I will help you with all my power. Still, do not forget that you must act with the most extreme prudence, and, above all, the greatest moderation; a second of forgetfulness would ruin you, by alarming the innumerable spies scattered round the Convent of the Bernardines. I trust that you have heard and understood me, my friend?"

"Yes, Don Valentine."

"And you will act as I recommend?"

"I promise it."

"Reflect, that you are perhaps risking the loss of your future happiness."

"I will not forget your recommendation, I swear to you; I am risking too great a stake in this game, which must decide my future life, to let myself be induced to commit any act of violence."

"Good; I am happy to hear you speak thus; but have confidence, my friend, I feel certain that we shall succeed."

"May heaven hear you!"

"It always hears those who appeal to it with a pure heart and a lively faith. Hope, I tell you. And now, my dear Don Martial, permit me to say a few words to our worthy friend, Belbumeur."

"I will withdraw."

"What for? have I any secrets from you? You can hear what I am going to say to him."

"You have nothing to say to me, Valentine," the hunter said with a shake of his head, "nothing but what I know already; I have no

other interest in what is about to take place beyond the deep friendship that attached me to the count and now to you. You think that the recollection I have preserved of our unhappy friend cannot be sufficiently engraven on my heart for me to risk my life at your side in avenging him; but you are mistaken, Valentine, that's all. I will not abandon you in the hour of combat; I will remain at your side even should you order me to leave you. I tell you that I swear, and have taken an oath to that effect, to make a shield of my body to protect you, if it should be necessary. Now, give me your hand, and suppose we say no more about it?"

Valentine remained silent for a moment; a scalding tear ran down his bronzed cheek, and he took the hand of the honest, simple-minded Canadian, and merely uttered the words—

"Thank you; I accept."

They then rose, and returned to their carriage, after Valentine had warned his faithful body-guard, Curumilla, by a signal that he could leave his hiding-place, as the interview was over. A quarter of an hour later the three gentlemen reached the house in the Calle de Tacuba, where Curumilla was already awaiting them.

letting off *cohetes*, that supreme amusement of the Mexicans.

This time the affair was serious, for the inhabitants wished to celebrate in a proper manner the anniversary of the Proclamation of Independence, of which the day to which we allude was the eve.

At sunrise a formidable *bando* issued from the government palace, and went through all the streets and squares of the city, announcing with a mighty clamor of bugles and drums, that on the next day there would be a bull-fight with "Jamaica" and "Monte Parnasso" for the leperos, high mass celebrated in all the churches, theatres thrown open gratis, a review of the garrison, and of all the troops quartered sixty miles round, and fireworks and illuminations at night, with open-air balls and feria.

The government did things nobly, it must be confessed; hence the people issued from their houses, spread feverishly through the streets at an early hour, laughing, shouting, and letting off squibs, while singing the praises of the President of the Republic, and taking, after their fashion, something on account of the morrow's festival.

Don Martial, in order to throw out the spies doubtless posted round Valentine's house, had left his friend in the middle of the night, and gone to his lodgings, and a few minutes before day proceeded to the house of Mr. Rallier.

Although the sun was not yet above the horizon, the French gentleman was already up and conversing with his brother Edward, while waiting for the Tigrero. Edward was ready to start, and his brother was giving him his parting recommendations.

"You are welcome," the Frenchman said, cordially, on perceiving

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BLANK SIGNATURE.

ON the morrow, Mexico awoke to a holiday; nothing extraordinary, in a country where the year is a perpetual holiday, and where the most frivolous pretext suffices for

Don Martial; "I was busy with our affair. My brother Edward is just off to our quinta, whither my mother and my brother Auguste proceeded two days ago, so that we might find all in order on our arrival."

Although the Tigrero did not entirely understand what the banker said to him, he considered it unnecessary to show it, and hence bowed without answering.

"All this is settled, then," Mr. Rallier continued, addressing his brother; "get every thing ready, for we shall probably arrive before mid-day—that is to say, in time for lunch."

"Your country-house is not far from the city?" the Tigrero asked, for the sake of saying something.

"Hardly five miles; it is at St. Angel; but in an excellent position for defence in the event of an attack. You are aware that St. Angel is built on the side of an extinct volcano, and surrounded by lava and spongy scoria, which renders an approach very difficult."

"I must confess my ignorance of the fact."

"In a country like this, where the government is bound to think of its own defence before troubling itself about individuals, it is as well to take one's precautions, and be always perfectly on guard. And now be off, my dear Edward; your weapons are all right, and two resolute peons will accompany you; besides, the sun is now rising, and you will have a pleasant ride; so good-by till we meet again."

The two brothers shook hands, and the young man, after bowing to Don Martial, left the house, followed by two servants well mounted, and armed like himself. During this conversation the peons had put the horses in a close carriage.

"Get in," said Mr. Rallier.

"What!" Don Martial replied, "are we going to drive?"

"By Jove! do you think I would venture to go to the convent on horseback? why, we could not go along a street before we were recognized."

"But this carriage will betray you."

"I admit it; but no one will know whom it contains when the shutters are drawn up, which I shall be careful to do before leaving the house. Come, get in."

The Tigrero placed himself by the Frenchman's side; the latter pulled up the shutters, and started at a gallop in a direction diametrically opposed to that which it should have followed, in order to reach the convent.

"Where are we going?" the Tigrero asked, presently.

"To the Convent of the Bernardines."

"I fancy we are not going the right road."

"That is possible; but, at any rate, it is the safest."

"I humbly confess that I cannot understand it at all."

Mr. Rallier began laughing.

"My good fellow," he replied, "you will understand at the right time: so be easy. You need only know, that in acting as I am doing, I am carrying out to the letter the instructions of Valentine, my friend and yours. It was not for nothing that he has so long borne the name of the Trail-hunter; besides, you remember the prairie adage, which has always appeared to me full of good sense, 'The shortest road from one point to another is a crooked line.' Well, we are following the crooked line—that is all. Besides, in all that is about to take place, you must remain completely out of the question, and restrict yourself to being a spec-

tator, rather than an actor, and willing to obey me in every thing I may order. Does this part displease you?"

The Frenchman said this with the merry accent and delightful simplicity which formed the basis of his character, and which caused everybody to like him whom accident brought in contact with him.

"I have no repugnance to obey you, Senor Don Antonio," the Tigrero answered. "The confidence our common friend places in you is a sure guarantee to me of your intentions. Hence dispose of me as you think proper, without fearing the slightest objection on my part."

"That is the way to talk," the banker said, with a laugh. "Now, to begin, my dear senor, you will do me the pleasure of changing your dress, for the one you wear is slightly too worldly for the place to which we are going.

"Change my dress?" the Tigrero exclaimed. "Diablos! you ought to have told me so at your house."

"Unnecessary, my dear sir. I have all you require here."

"Here?"

"Well, you shall see," he said, as he took from one of the coach pockets a Franciscan's gown, while from the other he drew a pair of sandals and a cord. "Have you not worn this dress before?"

"I have."

"Well, you are going to put it on again, and for the following reasons: At the convent, people believe (or pretend to believe, which comes to the same thing) that you are a Franciscan monk. For the sake, then, of persons who are not in the secret, it is necessary that I should be accompanied by a monk, and more, that they may be able, if required, to take their oaths to the fact."

"I obey you. But will not your coachman be surprised at seeing a Franciscan emerge from the carriage into which he showed a caballero?"

"My coachman? Pardon me, but I do not think you looked at him?"

"Indeed, I did not. All these Indians are alike, and equally hideous."

"That is true; however, look at him."

Don Martial bent forward, and slightly lowered the shutter.

"Curumilla!" he cried, in amazement, as he drew back. "He, and so well disguised?"

"Do you now believe that he will be surprised?"

"I was wrong."

"No, but you do not take the trouble to reflect."

"Well, I will put on the gown since I must. Still, with your permission, I will keep my weapons under it."

"Caspita! my permission? On the contrary, I order you to do so. But what are they?"

"You shall see. A machete, a knife, and a pair of pistols."

"That is first-rate. If necessary, I shall be able to find you a rifle. Trust to me for that."

While talking thus, the Tigrero had changed his dress; that is to say, he had simply put the gown over his other clothes, fastened the rope round his body, and substituted the sandals for his boots.

"There," the Frenchman continued, "you are a perfect monk."

"No; I want something more, something which is even indispensable."

"What's that?"

"The hat."

"That's true."

"That part of my costume I hardly know how we shall obtain."

"Man of little faith!" the Frenchman said with a smile, "see, and be confounded!"

While speaking thus he raised the front cushion, opened the box it covered, and pulled out the hat of a monk of St. Francis, which he gave the Tigrero.

"And now do you want any thing else, pray?" he asked, mockingly.

"Indeed, no. Why, your carriage is a perfect locomotive shop!"

"Yes, it contains a little of every thing. But we have arrived," he added, seeing the carriage stop. "You remember that you must in no way make yourself prominent, and simply confine yourself to doing what I tell you. That is settled, I think?"

The Frenchman opened the door, for the carriage had really stopped in front of the Convent of the Bernardines. Two or three ill-looking fellows were prowling about: and, in spite of their affected indifference, it was easy to recognize them for spies. The Frenchman and his companion were not deceived. They got out with an indifference as well assumed as that of the spies, and approached the door slowly, which was opened at their first knock, and closed again behind them with a speed that proved the slight confidence the sister porter placed in the individuals left outside.

"What do you desire, senores?" she asked, politely, after curtseying to the new-comers with a smile of recognition.

"My dear sister," the Frenchman answered, "be good enough to inform the holy mother abbess of our visit, and ask her to favor us with an interview for a few moments."

"It is still very early, brother," the nun answered, "and I do not

know if holy mother can receive you at this moment."

"Merely mention my name to her sister, and I feel convinced that she will make no difficulty about receiving us."

"I doubt it, brother, for, as I said before, it is very early. Still, I am willing to tell her, in order to prove to you my readiness to serve you."

"I feel deeply grateful to you for the kindness, sister."

The sister then left the parlor, after begging the two gentlemen to wait a moment. During her absence the Frenchman and his companion did not exchange a syllable; however, this absence was short, and only lasted a few minutes.

Without speaking, the sister made the visitors a sign to follow her, and led them to the parlor where we have already taken the reader, and where the abbess was waiting for them.

The Mother Superior was pale, and seemed anxious and pre-occupied. She invited the two gentlemen to sit down, and waited silently till they addressed her. They, on their side, seemed to be waiting for her to inquire into the nature of their visit; but, as she did not do so, and this silence threatened to be prolonged for some time, Mr. Rallier resolved on breaking it.

"I had the honor, madam," he said, with a respectful bow, "to send you yesterday, by one of my servants, a letter, in which I informed you of this morning's visit."

"Yes, caballero," she at once answered, "I duly received this letter, and your sister Helena is ready to go away with you, whenever you express the wish. Still permit me to make one request of you."

"Speak, madam, and if I can be of any service to you, believe me

that I shall eagerly seize the opportunity."

"I know not, caballero, how to explain myself, for what I have to say to you is really so strange that I fear lest it should call up a smile to your lips. Although Dona Helena has only been a few months in our convent, she has made herself so beloved by all her companions, through her charming character, that her departure is an occasion of mourning for all of us."

"You render me very happy and very proud by speaking thus of my sister, madam."

"This praise is only the expression of the strictest truth, caballero. We are all really most grieved to see her leave us thus. Still, I should not have ventured thus to make myself the interpreter of our regrets, were there not a very strong reason that renders it almost a duty to speak to you."

"I am listening to you, madam, though I can guess beforehand what you are going to say to me."

She looked at him in surprise.

"You guess! Oh, it is impossible, señor," she exclaimed.

The Frenchman smiled.

"My sister, Dona Helena, as is generally the case in convents, has chosen one of her companions, whom she loves more than the others, and made her her intimate friend. Is such the case, madam?"

"How do you know it?"

He continued, with a smile—

"Now this young lady, so beloved not only by Helena but by you, madam, and all your community, is a gentle, kind, loving girl, who, in consequence of a great misfortune, became insane, but whom your tender care has restored to reason. Still, you keep the latter fact a profound secret, before all from her guardian, who, not contented with

having stripped her of her fortune, now insists on robbing her of her happiness by forcing her to marry him."

"Señor, señor," the abbess exclaimed, as she rose from her seat, with an astonishment blended with terror, "who are you that you know so many things of which I believed the whole world ignorant?"

"Who am I, madam? the brother of Helena, that is to say, a man in whom you can place the most entire confidence. Hence permit me to proceed."

The abbess, still suffering from extreme agitation, sat down again.

"Go on, caballero," she said.

"The guardian of Dona Anita, either that he has suspicion, or for some other motive, wrote to you yesterday, ordering you to prepare her to marry him within twenty-four hours. Since the receipt of this fatal letter, Dona Anita has been plunged in the deepest despair, a despair further heightened by the sudden departure of my sister, the only friend in whose arms she can safely reveal her heart's secrets. But you, madam, who are so holy and good, are aware that God can at his pleasure confound the projects of the wicked, and change wormwood into honey. Did you not receive a visit yesterday from Don Serapio de la Ronda?"

"Yes, that gentleman deigned to visit me a few moments before I received the fatal letter to which you have referred."

"Did not Don Serapio, on leaving you, say these words: 'Be kind enough to inform Dona Anita that a friend is watching over her; that this friend has already given her unequivocal proofs of the interest he takes in her happiness, and that, on the day when she again sees the Franciscan monk, to whom she con-

fessed once before, all her misfortunes will be ended?"

"Yes, Don Serapio did utter those words."

"Well, madam, I am sent to you, not only by him, but by another person, who is no less than the President of the Republic, not only to take away my sister, but also to ask you to deliver up to me Dona Anita, who will accompany her."

"Heaven is my witness, señor, that I would be delighted to do what you ask of me. Unhappily, it is not in my power; Dona Anita was entrusted to me by her sole relation, who is at the same time her guardian, and though he is unworthy of that title, and my heart bleeds in refusing you, it is to him alone that I am bound to deliver her."

"This objection, madam, the justice of which I fully appreciate, has been foreseen by the persons whose representative I am. Hence they consulted on the means to remove the scruples by entirely releasing you from responsibility. Father, give this lady the paper, of which you are the bearer."

Without uttering a word, Don Martial took from his pocket the blank signature Valentine had entrusted to him, and handed it to the abbess.

"What is this?" she asked.

"Madam," the Frenchman answered, "that paper is a blank signature of the President of the Republic, who orders you to deliver Dona Anita into my hands."

"I see it," she said sorrowfully; "unfortunately this blank signature, which would everywhere else have the strength of the law, is powerless here. We only indirectly depend on the temporal power, but are completely subjugated to the spiritual power, and we can only receive orders from it."

The Tigrero took a side glance full of despair, at his companion, whose face was still smiling.

"What would you require, madam," he continued, "in order to consent to give up this unhappy young lady to me?"

"Alas, señor, it is not I who refuse compliance. Heaven is my witness that it is my greatest desire to see her escape from her persecutor."

"I am thoroughly convinced of that, madam; that is why, feeling persuaded of your good feeling towards your charge, I ask you to tell me what authority you require in order to give her up to me."

"I cannot, señor, allow Dona Anita to quit this convent without a perfectly regular order, signed by Monseigneur the Archbishop of Mexico, who alone has the right to command here, and whom I am compelled to obey."

"And if I had that order, madam, all your scruples would be removed?"

"Yes, all, señor."

"You would have no further difficulty in allowing Dona Anita to depart?"

"I would deliver her to you at once, señor."

"Since that is the case, madam, I will ask you to do so, for I have brought you that order."

"You have it?" she said, with undisguised delight.

"Here it is," he answered, as he took a paper from his pocket-book and handed it to her.

She opened it at once, and eagerly perused it.

"Oh now," she continued, "Dona Anita is free, and I will——"

"One moment, madam," he interrupted her, "have you carefully read the order I had the honor of giving you?"

"Yes, sir."

"In that case be kind enough to allow the young ladies to put on secular clothing, and, as their departure must be kept secret, allow my carriage to enter the front court-yard. I fancied I saw some ill-looking fellows prowling about the neighborhood, who looked to me like spies."

"What must I say, though, to the young lady's guardian? I am going to see him to-day."

"I am aware of that, madam. Gain time; tell him that his ward is ill; that you have succeeded in gaining her consent to the projected marriage, but, on the condition that it be deferred for eight and forty hours. It is a falsehood I am suggesting to you, madam, but it is necessary, and I feel convinced that Heaven will pardon it."

"Oh, do not be anxious about that, señor. I will gladly take on myself the responsibility of this falsehood; Dona Anita's guardian will not dare to oppose so short a delay, however well inclined he may be to do so: but in forty-eight hours?"

"In forty-eight hours, madam," the Frenchman answered in a hollow voice, "General Guerrero will not come to claim the hand of Dona Anita."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ON THE ROAD.

ALL the scruples of the Mother Superior—honorable scruples, let us hasten to add—having thus been removed, one after the other, by Mr. Rallier, by means of the double orders he had been careful to pro-

vide himself with, the next thing was to see about getting the two boarders away without further delay.

The abbess, who understood the importance of a speedy conclusion, left her visitors in the parlor, and in order to avoid any misunderstanding, herself undertook to fetch the two young ladies, after giving a lay-sister orders to call the carriage into the first court-yard.

In a religious community, one of women before all—we do not mean this satirically—whatever may be done, and whatever precautions may be taken, nothing can long be kept a secret. Hence, the two gentlemen had scarcely entered the speaking-room of the abbess ere the rumor of the departure of Dona Anita and Dona Helena spread among the nuns with extreme rapidity. Who spread the news no one could have told, and yet everybody spoke about it as a certainty.

The young ladies were naturally the first informed. At the outset their anxiety was great, and Dona Anita trembled, for she believed that she was fetched by order of her guardian, and that the monk speaking with the abbess was the one sent by the general to make immediate preparations for her marriage. Hence, when the abbess entered Dona Helena's cell, she found the pair in each other's arms, and weeping bitterly.

Fortunately, the mistake was soon cleared up, and the sorrow converted into joy when the abbess, who, through sympathy, wept as much as her boarders, explained that of the two strangers, whom they feared so greatly, one was the brother of Dona Helena, and the other the Franciscan monk whom Dona Anita had already seen, and that they had come, not to add to her sufferings,

but to remove her from the tyranny that oppressed her.

Dona Helena, on hearing that her brother was at the convent, bounded with joy, and removed her friend's last doubts, for, like all unhappy persons, Dona Anita clung greedily to this new hope of salvation, which was thus allowed to germinate in her heart at a moment when she believed that she had no chance left of escaping her evil destiny.

The abbess then urged them to complete their preparations for departure, helped them to change their dress, and, after embracing them several times, conducted them to the parlor.

In order to avoid any disturbance when the young ladies left the convent, where everybody adored them, the abbess had the good idea of sending the nuns to their cells. It was a very prudent measure, which, by preventing leave-taking, also prevented any noisy manifestations of cries and tears, the sound of which might have been heard outside, and have fallen on hostile ears.

The leave-taking was short, for there was no time to lose in vain compliments. The young ladies drew down their vails, and proceeded to the courtyard under the guidance of the abbess. The carriage had been drawn as close as possible to the cloisters, and the court was entirely deserted—only the abbess, the sister porter, and a confidential nun witnessing the departure.

As the Frenchman opened the door of the carriage, a piece of paper lying on the seat caught his eyes. He seized it without being seen, and hid it in the hollow of his hand. After kissing the good abbess for the last time, the young ladies took the back seat, and Don Martial the

front, as did Mr. Rallier, after previously whispering to the coachman—that is, to Curumilla, two Indian words, to which he replied by a sinister grin. Then, at a signal from the abbess, the convent gates were opened, and the carriage started at full speed, drawn by six powerful mules.

The crowd silently made room for it to pass, the gates closed again immediately, and the carriage almost immediately disappeared round the corner of the next street.

It was about seven o'clock in the morning. The fugitives—for we can give them no other name—galloped in silence for the first ten or fifteen minutes, when the Frenchman gently touched his companion's shoulder, and offered him the paper he had found in the carriage.

"Read it!" he said.

The paper only contained two words, hurriedly written in pencil—
"Take care."

"Oh, oh!" the Tigrero exclaimed, turning pale, "what does this mean?"

"By Jove," the Frenchman answered, cautiously, "it means that, in spite of our precautions, or perhaps on account of them—for in these confounded affairs a man never knows how to act in order to deceive the persons he fears—we are discovered, and probably have spies at our heels."

"Carai! and what will become of the young ladies in the event of a dispute?"

"In the event of a fight you mean, for there will be an obstinate one, I foretell. Well, we will defend them as well as we can."

"I know that; but suppose we are killed?"

"Ah! there is that chance; but I never think of that till after the event."

"Oh, heaven!" Dona Anita murmured, as she hid her head in her friend's bosom.

"Re-assure yourself, *senorita*," the Frenchman continued, "and, above all, be silent; for the sound of your voice might be recognized, and change into certainty what may still be only a suspicion. Besides, remember that if you have enemies, you have also friends, since they took the precaution to warn us. Now, in all probability, this unknown offerer of advice will not have stopped there, but thought of the means to come to our assistance in the most effectual manner."

The carriage went along in the meanwhile at a break-neck pace, and had nearly reached the city gates. We will now tell what had happened, and how the Frenchman was warned of the danger that threatened him.

General Don Sebastian Guerrero had organized a band of spies composed of leperos and scoundrels, who, however, possessed acknowledged cleverness and skill, and if Valentine had escaped their surveillance and foiled their machinations, it was solely through the habits which he had contracted during a lengthened life in the prairies, and which had become an intuition with him, so far did he carry the quality of scenting and unmasking an enemy, whatever might be the countenance he borrowed. But if he had not been recognized, it was not the same with his friends, and the latter had not been able long to escape the lynx eyes of the general's spies.

The Convent of the Bernardines had naturally become for some days past the centre of the surveillance, as it were the spying head-quarters, of Don Sebastian's agents. The arrival of a carriage with closed blinds

at the convent at once gave the alarm; and though Mr. Rallier was not personally known, the fact of his being a Frenchman was sufficient to rouse suspicions.

While the Frenchman and the monk were conversing in the parlor with the abbess, a lepero pretended to hurt himself, and was conveyed by two of his acolytes to the convent-gate, and the good-hearted porter had not refused him admission, but, on the contrary, had eagerly given him all the assistance his condition seemed to require.

While the lepero was gradually regaining his senses, his comrades asked questions with that cautious skill peculiar to their Mexican nature. The sister-porter was a worthy woman, endowed with a very small stock of brains, and fond of talking. On finding this opportunity to indulge in her favorite employment, she was easily led on, and, almost of her own accord, told all she knew, not suspecting the harm she did. Let us hasten to add that this all was very little; but, being understood and commented on by intelligent men interested in discovering the truth, it was extremely serious.

When the three leperos had drawn all they could out of the sister-porter, they hastened to leave the convent. Just as they emerged into the street, they found themselves face to face with No Carnero, the general's capataz, whom his master had sent on a tour of discovery. They ran up to him, and in a few words told him what had happened.

This was grave, and the capataz trembled inwardly at the revelation, for he understood the terrible danger by which his friends were menaced. But Carnero was a clever man, and at once made up his mind to his course of action.

He greatly praised the leperos for

the skill they had displayed in discovering the secret, put some piastres into their hands, and sent them off to the general, with the recommendation, which was most unnecessary, to make all possible speed. Then, in his turn, he began prowling round the convent, and especially the carriage, which Curumilla made no difficulty in letting him approach, for the reader will doubtless have guessed that the animosity the Indian had on several occasions evinced for the capataz was pretended, and that they were perfectly good friends when nobody could see or hear them.

The capataz skilfully profited by the confusion created in the crowd by the carriage entering the convent, to throw in, unperceived, the paper Mr. Rallier had found. Certain now that his friends would be on their guard, he went off in his turn, after recommending the spies he left before the couvent to keep up a good watch, and walked in the direction of the Plaza Mayor smoking a cigarette.

At the corner of the Calle de Plateros he saw a man standing in front of a pulqueria, engaged in smoking an enormous cigar. The capataz entered the pulqueria, drank a glass of Catalonian *refino*, but while paying, he clumsily let fall a piastre which rolled to the foot of the man standing in the doorway. The latter stooped, picked up the coin, and restored it to its owner, and the capataz walked out, doubtless satisfied with the quality of the spirit he had imbibed, and cautiously continued his way. On reaching the plaza again, the man of the pulqueria, who was probably going the same road as himself, was at his heels.

"Belhumeur?" the capataz asked,

in a low voice, without turning round.

"Eh?" the other answered in the same key.

"The general knows the affair at the convent; if you do not make haste, Don Martial, Don Antonio, and the two ladies will be attacked on the road while going to the *quinta*; warn your friend, for there is not a moment to lose. Devil take the cigarette!" he added, throwing it away; "it has gone out."

When he turned back, Belhumeur had disappeared; the Canadian with his characteristic agility was already running in the direction of Valentine's house. As for the capataz, as he was in no particular hurry, he quietly walked back to the general's, where he found his master in a furious passion with all his people, and more particularly with himself.

By an accident, too portentous not to have been arranged beforehand, not one of his horses could be mounted; three were foundered, four others had been bled, and the last three were without shoes. In the midst of this the capataz arrived with a look of alarm, which only heightened his master's passion. Carnero prudently allowed the general's fury to grow a little calm, and then answered him.

He proved to him in the first place that he would commit a serious act of imprudence by himself starting in pursuit of the fugitives in the present state of affairs, and especially on the eve of a *pronunciamiento* which was about to decide his fortunes. Then he remarked to him that six peons, commanded by a resolute man, would be sufficient to conquer two men probably badly armed, and, in addition, shut up in a carriage with two ladies, whom they would not expose to the risk of

being killed. These reasons being good, the general listened and yielded to them.

"Very good," he said; "Carnero, you are one of my oldest servants, and to you I entrust the duty of bringing back my niece."

The capataz made a wry face.

"There will be probably plenty of blows to receive, and very little profit to derive from such an expedition."

"I believed that you were devoted to me," the general remarked bitterly.

"Your excellency is not mistaken; I am truly devoted to you, but I have also a fondness for my skin."

"I will give you twenty-five ounces for every slit it receives; is that enough?"

"Come, I see that your excellency wishes me to be cut into mincemeat!" the capataz exclaimed joyously.

"Then that is agreed?"

"I should think so, excellency; at that price a man would be a fool to refuse."

"But about horses?"

"We have at least ten or a dozen in the corral."

"That is true; I did not think of that," the general exclaimed, striking his forehead; "have seven lassoed at once."

"Where must I take the senorita?"

"Bring her to this house, for she shall not set foot in the convent again."

"Very good; when shall I start, general?"

"At once, if it be possible."

"In twenty minutes I shall have left the house."

But the general's impatience was so great that he accompanied his capataz to the corral, watched all the

preparations for the departure, and did not return to his apartments till he was certain that Carnero had started in pursuit of the fugitives, with the peons he had selected.

In the meanwhile the carriage dashed along; it passed at full gallop through the San Lazaro gate, then turned suddenly to the right, and entered a somewhat narrow street. At about the middle of this street it stopped before a house of rather modest appearance, the gate of which at once opened, and a man came out holding the bridles of two prairie mustangs completely harnessed, and with a rifle at each saddle-bow. The Frenchman got out, and invited his companion to follow his example.

"Resume your usual dress," he said, as he lead him inside the house.

The Tigrero obeyed with an eager start of joy. While he doffed his gown, his companion mounted, after saying to the young ladies—

"Whatever happens, not a word—not a cry; keep the shutters up; we will gallop at the door, and remember your lives are in peril."

Martial at this moment came out of the house attired as a caballero.

"To horse, and let us be off," said Mr. Rallier.

The Tigrero bounded on to the mustang held in readiness for him, and the carriage, in which the mules had been changed, started again at full speed. The house at which they had stopped was the one hired by Valentine to keep his stud at.

Half an hour thus passed, and the carriage disappeared in the thick cloud of dust it raised as it dashed along. Don Martial felt new born; the excitement had restored his old ardor as if by enchantment; he longed to be face to face with his foe, and at length come to a settle-

ment with him. The Frenchman was calmer; though brave to rashness, it was with secret anxiety he foresaw the probability of a fight, in which his sister might be wounded; still he was resolved, in the event of the worst, to confront the danger, no matter the number of men who ventured to attack them.

All at once the Indian uttered a cry. The two men looked back, and saw a body of men coming up at full speed. At this moment the carriage was following a road bounded on one side by a rather thick chapparal, on the other by a deep ravine.

At a sign from the Frenchman the carriage was drawn across the road, and the ladies got out and went, under Curumilla's protection, to seek shelter behind the trees. The two men, with their rifles to their shoulders and fingers on the triggers, stood firmly in the middle of the road, awaiting the onset of their adversaries, for, in all probability, the new-comers were enemies.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A SKIRMISH.

CURUMILLA, after concealing, with that Indian skill he so thoroughly possessed, the young ladies at a spot where they were thoroughly protected from bullets, had placed himself, rifle in hand, not by the side of the two riders, but, with characteristic red-skin prudence, he ambuscaded himself behind the carriage, probably reflecting that he represented the entire infantry force, and not caring, through a point of honor, very absurd in his opinion,

to expose himself to a death not only certain, but useless to those he wished to defend.

The horsemen, however, on coming within range of the persons they were pursuing, stopped, and, by their gestures, seemed to evince a hesitation the fugitives did not at all understand, after the fashion in which they had hitherto been pursued. The motive for this hesitation, which the Frenchman and his companions could not know, and which perplexed them so greatly, was very simple.

Carnero, for it was the general's capataz who was pursuing the carriage, with his peons, all at once perceived, with a secret pleasure, it is true, though he was careful not to let his companions notice it, that while they were pursuing the carriage, other horsemen were pursuing them, and coming up at headlong speed. On seeing this, as we said, the party halted, much disappointed and greatly embarrassed as to what they had better do.

They were literally placed between two fires, and were the attacked instead of the assailants; the situation was critical, and deserved serious consideration. Carnero suggested a retreat, remarking, with a certain amount of reason, that the sides were no longer equal, and that success was highly problematical. The peons, all utter ruffians, and expressly chosen by the general, but who entertained a profound respect for the integrity of their limbs, and were but very slightly inclined to have them injured in so disadvantageous a contest with people who would not recoil, were disposed to follow the advice of the capataz and retire, before a retreat became impossible.

Unhappily, the Zaragate was among the peons. Believing, from his conversation with the colonel,

that he knew better than any one the general's intentions, and attracted by the hope of a rich reward if he succeeded in delivering him of his enemy, that is to say, in killing Valentine; and, moreover, probably impelled by the personal hatred he entertained for the hunter, he would not listen to any observation, and swore with horrible oaths that he would carry out the general's orders at all hazards, and that, since the persons they were ordered to stop were only a few paces before them, they ought not to retire until they had, at least, attempted to perform their duty; that if his comrades were such cowards as to desert him, he would go on alone at his own risk, certain that the general would be satisfied with the way in which he behaved.

After a declaration so distinct and peremptory, any hesitation became impossible, the more so as the horsemen were rapidly coming up, and if the capataz hesitated much longer he would be attacked in the rear. Thus driven out of his last intrenchment, and compelled against his will to fight, Carnero gave the signal to push on ahead.

But the peons had scarce started, ere three shots were fired, and three men rolled in the dust. The newcomers, in this way, warned their friends to hold their ground, and that they were bringing help. The dismounted peons were not wounded, though greatly shaken by their fall, and unable to take part in the fight; their horses alone were hit, and that so cleverly, that they at once fell.

"Eh, eh!" the capataz said, as he galloped on; "these picaros have a very sure hand. What do you think of it?"

"I say that there are still four of us; that is double the number of

those waiting for us down there, and we are sufficient to master them."

"Don't be so sure, my good friend, Zaragate," the capataz said with a grin; "they are men made of iron, who must be killed twice over before they fall."

The Tigrero and his companions had heard shots and seen the peons bite the dust.

"There is Valentine," said the Frenchman.

"I believe so," Don Martial replied.

"Shall we charge?"

"Yes."

And digging in their spurs, they dashed at the peons.

Valentine and his two comrades, Belhumeur and Black Elk (for the Frenchman was not mistaken, it was really the hunter coming up, whom the Canadian had warned) fell on the peons simultaneously with Don Martial and his companion.

A terrible, silent, and obstinate struggle went on for some minutes between these nine men; the foes had seized each other round the body, as they were too close to use firearms, and tried to stab each other. Nothing was heard but angry curses and panting, but not a word or cry, for what is the use of insulting when you can kill?

The Zaragate, so soon as he recognized the hunter, dashed at him. Valentine, although taken off his guard, offered a vigorous resistance; the two men were entwined like serpents, and, in their efforts to dismount each other, at last both fell, and rolled beneath the feet of the combatants who, without thinking of them, or perceiving their fall, continued to attack each other furiously.

The hunter was endowed with

great muscular strength and unequalled science and agility; but on this occasion he had found an adversary worthy of him. The Zaragate, some years younger than Valentine, and possessed of his full bodily strength, while urged on by the love of rich reward, made super-human efforts to master his opponent and plunge his navaja into his throat. Several times had each of them succeeded in getting the other underneath, but, as so frequently happens in wrestling, a sudden movement of the shoulders or loins had changed the position of the adversaries and brought the one beneath who a moment previously had been on the top.

Still Valentine felt that his strength was becoming exhausted; the unexpected resistance he met with from an enemy apparently so little worthy of him, exasperated him and made him lose his coolness. Collecting all his remaining vigor to attempt a final and decisive effort, he succeeded in getting his enemy once again under him, and pinned him down; but at the same moment Valentine uttered a cry of pain and rolled on the ground—a horse's kick had broken his left arm.

The Zaragate sprang up with a tiger's bound, and bursting into a yell of delight, placed his knee on his enemy's chest, at the same time as he prepared to bury his navaja in his heart. Valentine felt that he was lost, and did not attempt to avoid the death that threatened him.

"Poor Louis," he merely said, looking firmly and intrepidly at the bandit.

"Ah, ah!" the Zaragate said, with a ferocious grin, "I hold my vengeance at length, accursed Trail-hunter."

He did not complete the sentence;

suddenly seized by his long hair, while a knee, thrust between his shoulders, forced him to bend back, he saw, as in a horrible dream, a ferocious face grinning above his head. With a fearful groan he rolled on the ground; a knife had been buried in his heart, while his scalp, which was suddenly removed, left his denuded skull to inundate with blood the ground around.

Curumilla raised in his arms the body of his friend, whose life he had just saved once again, and bore it to the side of the road. Valentine had fainted.

The chief, so soon as he saw his friends charge the peons, left his ambush, and while careful to remain behind them, followed them to the battle-field. He had watched eagerly the long struggle between the hunter and the Zaragate, trying vainly to assist his friend, but never able to succeed. The two enemies were so entwined, their movements were so rapid, and they changed their position so suddenly, that the chief was afraid lest he might wound his friend in attempting to help him. Hence he awaited with extreme anxiety an opportunity so long delayed, and which the Zaragate himself offered by losing his time in insulting his enemy instead of killing him at once, when the injury he received left him defenceless in the bandit's power.

The Araucano bounded like a wild beast on the Mexican, and without hesitation scalped and stabbed him with the agility characteristic of the red-skins, and which he himself possessed in so high a degree.

Almost at the same moment the horsemen also finished their fight. The peons had offered a vigorous resistance, but being badly supported by the capataz, who was dis-

abled at the beginning of the skirmish by Don Martial, and seeing the Zaragate dead and three of their friends dismounted and incapable of coming to their assistance, they gave in.

The capataz had been wounded at his own request by Don Martial, in order to save appearances with the general; he had a wide gash on his right arm, very severe at the first glance, but insignificant in reality. A peon had been almost smashed by Belhumeur, so that the field of battle fairly remained in the hands of the hunters.

When their victory was insured they assembled anxiously round Valentine, for they were alarmed at his condition, and most anxious to be reassured. Valentine, whose arm Curumilla had at once set, with the skill and coolness of an old practitioner, soon reopened his eyes, reassured his friends by a smile, and offered the Indian chief his right hand, which the latter laid on his heart with an expression of indescribable happiness, as he uttered his favorite exclamation of Ugh! the only word he permitted himself to use in joy or in sorrow, when he felt himself choking with internal emotion.

"Senores," the hunter said, "it is only an arm broken; thanks to the chief, I have had an easy escape. Let us resume our journey before other enemies come up."

"And we, senor?" the capataz cried, humbly.

Valentine rose with the chief's assistance, and took a furious glance at the peons. "As for you, miserable assassins," he said, with a terrible accent, "return to your master and tell him in what way you were received. But it is not sufficient to have chastised your perfidy: I must have revenge for the odious snare

into which my friends and I all but fell. I will learn whether, in open day, and some half a dozen miles from Mexico, bandits can thus attack peaceable travellers with impunity. Begone!"

Valentine was slightly mistaken, for, although it was really the intention of the peons to attack them, the hunters had actually begun the fight by dismounting the three peons. But the fellows, convicted by their conscience, did not notice this delicate distinction, and were very happy to get off so cheaply, and be enabled to return peaceably, when they feared that their conquerors would hand them over to the police as they had a perfect right to do.

Thus, far from raising any objections, they broke forth into apologies and protestations of devotion, and hastened off, not troubling themselves to pick up the body of their defunct comrade, le Zaragate, which they left to the vultures which settled on it, so soon as the highway was clear again.

The capataz, under the pretext that his wound was very painful, but in reality to give Valentine and his friends the requisite time to secure themselves temporarily from pursuit, insisted on returning to the city slowly, so that they did not reach the general's mansion till two hours had elapsed.

So soon as the peons in obedience to the hunter's orders had left the battle-field, he, on his part, gave his companions the signal to start. Don Martial had hurried to reassure the ladies, who were standing more dead than alive at the spot where the chief had concealed them. He made them get into the carriage again, without telling them any thing except that the danger was past, and that the rest of the journey would be performed in safety.

Valentine's friends tried in vain to induce him to get into the carriage with the ladies. He would not consent, but insisted on mounting his horse, assuring them, in the far from probable event of their being attacked again, that he could still be of some service to his companions in spite of his broken arm. The latter were too well acquainted with his inflexible will to press him farther: so Curumilla remounted the coach-box, and they started.

The rest of the journey was performed without any incident, and they reached the quinta twenty minutes later. The skirmish had taken place scarce two miles from the country house. On reaching the gates, Valentine took leave of his friend without dismounting.

"What!" the latter said to him, "are you going, Valentine, without resting for a moment?"

"I must, my dear Rallier," he answered; "you know what imperious reasons claim my presence in Mexico."

"But you are wounded."

"Have I not Curumilla to attend to my hurt? Do not be anxious about me; besides, I intend to see you again soon. This quinta appears to me strong enough to resist a surprise. Have you a garrison?"

"I have a dozen servants and my two brothers."

"In that case I am easy in my mind; besides, there is only one night to pass, and I believe that after the lesson his people have received the general will not venture on a second attack, for some days at least. Besides, he reckons on the success of his pronunciamiento. You will come to me to-morrow at daybreak, will you not?"

"I shall not fail."

"In that case I will be off."

"Will you not say good-by to the ladies?"

"They are not aware of my presence, and it will be better for them not to see me; so good-by till to-morrow."

And making a signal to his comrades who, including Curumilla, to whom a horse was given, collected around him, Valentine started at a gallop for Mexico, caring no more for his broken arm than if it were a mere scratch.

CHAPTER XXV.

LOS REGOCIJOS.

ON his return to the mansion, the capataz did not see his master, at which he was extremely pleased, for he desired to delay as long as possible an explanation which, in spite of the wound he so complacently displayed, he feared would turn out to his disadvantage, especially when questioned by a man like the general, whose piercing glance would descend to the bottom of his heart to discover the truth, however cleverly hidden it might be behind a network of falsehood.

As only a few hours had still to elapse before the explosion of the conspiracy, arranged with such care and mystery, the general was compelled for a while to suspend his schemes for the satisfaction of his love and his hatred, and only attend to those in which his ambition was engaged. The principal conspirators had been summoned to Colonel Lupo's, and there the final arrangements had been made for the morrow, and the watchword given.

Although the government appeared plunged in the most profound ignorance of what was preparing against it, and evinced complete security, still the President had made certain arrangements for the morrow's ceremonies which did not fail greatly to trouble the men interested in knowing every thing, and to whom the apparently most futile thing naturally created umbrage.

The general, with the curiosity that distinguished him, was anxious to know exactly the extent of the danger he had to meet, and proceeded to the palace, merely accompanied by his two aides-de-camp. The general president received Don Sebastian with a smile on his lips, and offered him the most gracious reception. This reception, so cordial, perhaps too cordial, instead of reassuring the general, had, on the contrary, increased his anxiety, for he was a Mexican and knew the proverb of his country—"Lips that smile, and mouths that tell falsehoods."

The general was too calm to let his feelings be seen. He pretended to be delighted, remained for some time with the President, who appeared to treat him with a friendly familiarity, complained of the rarity of his visits, and his obstinacy in not asking for a command. In a word, the two men separated apparently highly satisfied with each other.

Still, the general remarked that all the courts were stuffed with soldiers, who were bivouacking in the open air; that several guns had been placed, accidentally perhaps, so as to sweep completely the chief entrance gate, and, more serious still, that the troops quartered in the palace were commanded by officers strangers to him, and who had, moreover, the reputation of being devoted to the President of the Republic.

After this daring visit, the general mounted his horse, and, under the pretext of going for a walk, went all over the city. Everywhere the preparations for the coming festival were being carried on with the greatest activity. In the square of Necatitlan, for instance, situated in one of the worst parts of the capital, a circus had been made for the bull-fights at which the president intended to be present.

Numerous wooden erections, raised for the occasion, filled the space usually devoted to tauromachy, and formed an immense hall of verdure, with pleasant clumps of trees, mysterious walks, and charming retreats, prepared with the greatest care, where everybody would go on the morrow to eat and drink the atrocious productions of the Mexican art of cookery, and enjoy what is called in that country jamaica.

Exactly in the centre of the arena a tree about twenty feet in height was planted, with its branches and leaves entirely covered with colored pocket-handkerchiefs that floated in the breeze. This tree was the Monte Parnasso, intended to serve as a may-pole for the leperos, at the moment when the bull-fights begin, and a trial-bull, *emballado*, that is to say, with its horns terminating in balls, is let into the ring.

All the pulquerias near the square were thronged with a hideous, ragged mob, who howled, sang, shouted, and whistled their loudest, while smoking, and, at intervals, exchanging knife-thrusts, to the great delight of the spectators.

In all the streets the procession would pass through the houses were decorated; Mexican flags were hoisted in profusion at every spot where they could be displayed, and yet, by the side of all these holiday

preparations, there was, we repeat, something gloomy and menacing that struck a chill to the heart. Through all the gates fresh troops continually entered the city, and occupied admirably-chosen strategic points. The Alameda, the Paseo di Bucarelli, and even the Vega, were converted into bivouacs; and though these troops ostensibly only came to Mexico to be present at the ceremony and be reviewed, they were equipped for the field, and affected an earnestness which caused much thought to those who saw them pass or visited their bivouacs.

When a serious event is preparing, there are in the atmosphere certain signs which never deceive the fosterers of revolutions; a vague and apparently causeless anxiety seizes on the masses, and unconsciously converts their joy into a species of feverish excitement, at which they are themselves startled, as they know not to what to attribute this change in their humor.

Hence the population of Mexico, mad, merry, and joyous, as usual when a festival is preparing, in the eyes of short-sighted persons, were in reality sternly sad and suffering from great anxiety. The general did not fail to observe these prognostics; gloomy presentiments occupied his mind, for he understood that a terrible tempest was hidden beneath this fictitious calmness. Valentine's gloomy predictions recurred to him. He trembled to see the hunter's menaces realized; and, though unable to discover when the danger would come, he foresaw that a great *péril* was hanging over his head, and that his ambitious projects would soon, perhaps, be drowned in floods of blood.

Unfortunately it was too late to desist; he must, whatever might happen, go on to the end, for he had

not the time to give counter-orders, and urge the conspirators to defer the explosion of the plot till a more favorable moment. Hence, after ripe reflection, the general resolved to push on and trust to accident. Ambitious men, by the way, reckon, far more than is supposed, on hazard, and those magnificent combinations which are admired when success has crowned them, are most frequently merely the unforeseen results of fortuitous circumstances, completely beyond the will of the man whom they have profited. History, modern history especially, is full of these combinations, these results impossible to foresee, which sensible men would not have dared to suppose, and which have made the reputation of so-called statesmen of genius, who are very small fry, when regarded through the magnifying-glass, or when actions are sifted.

The general returned to his house at about six in the evening, despairing, and already seeing his plans annihilated. The report of his capataz added to his discouragement, for it was the drop of wormwood which makes the brimful cup run over. He withdrew to his apartments in a state of dull fury, and in his impotent rage accused himself for having ventured into this frightful situation, for he felt himself rapidly gliding down a fatal slope, where it would be impossible for him to stop.

What added to his secret agony was, that he must incessantly send off couriers, receive reports, talk with his confidants, and feign in their presence not merely calmness and gayety, but also encourage them, and impart to them an ardor and hope which he no longer possessed.

The whole night was spent thus. A terrible night, during which the general endured all the tortures that assail an ambitious man on the eve

of a scandalous plot against a government which he has sworn to defend. He was agitated by those dull murmurs of the conscience which can never be thoroughly stifled, and which would inspire pity for these unhappy men, were they not careful, by their own acts, to put themselves beyond the pale of that humanity of which they have become real monsters. The most wholesome lesson that could be given to those ambitious manikins, so frequent in the lower strata of society, would be to render them witnesses of the crushing agony that attacks any *cabecilla* during the night that precedes the outbreak of one of its horrible plots.

Sunrise surprised the general giving his final orders. Worn out by the fatigue of a long watch, with pallid brow, and eyes inflamed by fever, he tried to take a few moments of restorative rest, which he so greatly needed; but his efforts were fruitless, for he was suffering from an excitement too intense, at the decisive hour, for sleep to come and close his eyes.

Already the bells of all the churches were pealing out, and filling the air with their joyous notes. In all the streets, and in all the squares, boys and leperos were letting off crackers, and uttering deafening cries, which more resembled bursts of fury than demonstrations of joy. The people, dressed in their holiday clothes, were leaving their houses in masses, and spreading like a torrent over the city.

The review was arranged for seven o'clock A.M., so that the troops might be spared the great heat of the day. They were massed on the Paseo de Bucarelli and the road connecting that promenade with the Alameda.

We have already stated that the Mexican army, twenty thousand

strong, has twenty-four thousand officers. Hence, in the enormous crowd assembled to witness the review, uniforms were in a majority; for all the officers living on half-pay in Mexico, for some reason or another, considered themselves bound to attend the review as amateurs.

At a quarter to eight o'clock the drums beat, the troops presented arms, a deafening shout was raised by the crowd, and the President of the Republic arrived on the Paseo, followed by a large staff, glistening with gold and lace, and with a cloud of feathers waving in their cocked hats.

The Mexicans, much resembling in this respect another nation we are acquainted with, adore feathers, aiguillettes, and, before all, embroidered uniforms. Hence the President was warmly greeted by the enthusiastic crowd, and his arrival was converted into an ovation. General Guerrero had joined the President's staff in his full-dress uniform, as Colonel Lupo and other conspirators had also done; the rest, dispersed among the crowd, and well armed under their cloaks, were giving drink to the already half-intoxicated leperos, and secretly exciting them to begin an insurrection.

In the meanwhile the review went on without any hitch. It is true that the President restricted himself to riding along the front, and then ordering the troops to march past, for he did not dare, owing to the notorious ignorance of the officers and soldiers, risk the execution of any manœuvre, for it would not have been understood, and would have broken the charm under which the spectators were fascinated. Then the President, still followed by his staff, proceeded to the cathedral. We will not say any thing about

the official receptions, etc., which occupied all the morning.

The hour for the bull-fight arrived. Since the review no one troubled himself about the troops, who seemed to have suddenly disappeared—not a soldier was visible in the streets; but the people did not think of them, for they were letting off fireworks, laughing and shouting, which was quite sufficient to amuse them. It was only noticed that these soldiers, though invisible about the city, had apparently passed the word to each other to be present at the bull-fight. Nearly the whole of the *palcos de sol* in the circus, that is to say, the parts exposed to the sun, were thronged with soldiers, grouped pell-mell with the leperos, and offering the most pleasant contrast with these ragged scamps, who were yelling and whistling.

The President arrived, and the circus was, in a second, invaded by the mob. Since an early hour the jamaica had begun, that is to say, the framework of verdure raised in the centre of the arena, forming refreshment-rooms, had, since day-break, been filled with a countless number of leperos, who ate and drank with cries of ferocious delight.

Suddenly, at a given signal, the gate of the torril was opened, and a bull, *embollado*, rushed into the arena. Then began an extraordinary indescribable scene, resembling one of those diabolical meetings so admirably designed by Callot.

The leperos, surprised by the arrival of the bull, darted, shouting, pushing, and upsetting each other, over the framework, which they threw down and trampled under foot in their terror, while seeking to escape the pursuit of the *embollado*, who, also excited by the tumult,

hunted them vigorously. In a second the arena was deserted, the refreshment-rooms swept clean, and the performers in the jamaica sought any shelter they could find on the edge of the palcos or upon the columns, from which they hung in hideous yelling and grimacing clusters.

A few leperos, however, bolder than the rest, had darted to the Monte Parnasso, not only to find a shelter there, but also to tear away all the colored handkerchiefs fastened to the branches. In a twinkling the thick foliage was hidden by the crowd of leperos who invaded it.

The bull, after amusing itself for some minutes in tossing about the remains of the framework, stopped and looked cunningly around, and soon noticed the tree, the only obstacle left to remove, in order to completely empty the arena.

It remained motionless for an instant, as if hesitating ere it formed a resolution; then it bowed its head, made the sand fly with its fore-feet, lashed its tail violently, and, rushing at the tree, dealt it repeated and powerful blows.

The leperos uttered a cry of despair. The tree, which was overladen, and incessantly sapped at its base by the bull, swayed, and at last fell sideways, carrying down in its fall the leperos clinging to its branches. The audience clapped their hands and broke into frenzied bravos, which changed into perfect yells of delight when a poor fellow, who was limping away, was suddenly caught up by the bull, and tossed ten feet high in the air.

All at once, and at the moment when the joy was attaining its paroxysm, several rounds of artillery were heard, followed by a well-sustained musketry fire. As if by magic the bull was driven back to

the torril; the soldiers scattered about the circus leaped into the ring, and becoming actors instead of spectators, drew up in good order, and levelled their muskets at the occupiers of the galleries and boxes, who remained motionless with terror, for they did not understand what was going on.

A door opened, and twenty bands-men, followed by eight officers, and escorted by a dozen soldiers, entered the ring, and began beating the drums. It was a governmental *bando*. So soon as silence was restored martial law was proclaimed, and sentence of outlawry passed on General Don Sebastian Guerrero and his adherents, who had just raised the standard of revolt, and pronounced against the established government.

The crowd listened to the *bando* in a stupor which was heightened by the fact that with each moment the firing became sharper, and the artillery discharges shook the air at more rapid intervals.

Mexico was once again the prey of one of those scenes of murder and carnage which, since the Proclamation of Independence, has too often stained her streets and squares with blood.

The President was on horseback in the centre of the arena, sending off orders, listening to messages, or detaching reinforcements wherever they were wanted. The circus was converted into the head-quarters of the army of order, and the spectators, although allowed to depart after some arrests had been effected among them, remained trembling in their seats, preferring not to venture into the streets, which had been converted into real battle-fields.

Still the pronunciamiento was assuming formidable proportions. General Guerrero had not played

for so heavy a stake without trying to secure to his side all probable chances of success; and that success would most ably have crowned his efforts, had he not been betrayed. For, in spite of all the precautions taken by the government, the affair had been begun so warmly and resolutely that, after the contest had continued for three hours, it was impossible to say on which side the advantage would remain.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PRONUNCIAMIENTO.

IN any revolution, the insurgents have always an immense advantage over the government they are attacking, from the fact that, as they hold together, know their numbers, and act in accordance with a long worked-out plan, they are not only cognizant of what they want, but also, whither they are proceeding. The government, on the other hand, however well informed it may be, and however well on its guard, is obliged to remain for a considerable length of time in an attitude of armed expectation, without knowing whence the danger that menaces it will come, or the strength of the rebellion it will have to combat.

On the other hand, again, as the secret of the discovery of the plot remains with a small band of confidential agents of the authorities, the latter do not know at first whom to trust, or whom to reckon on. They suspect everybody, even the very troops defending them, whom they fear to see turning against them at any moment, and overthrowing them. This is more especially the

case in Mexico and all the old Spanish colonies, where the governmental system is essentially military, and is consequently only based on naturally unintelligent and venal troops, who are utterly deficient of patriotic feelings, and whom interest alone, that is to say, pay or promotion, can keep to their duty.

The history of all the revolutions which, during the last fifty years, have caused torrents of blood to flow in the New World, is entirely contained in the last passage we have written.

The President of the Republic had been informed of the designs of the general, as far as that was possible; he had known for more than a month that a vast plot was being formed; he even was aware of the probable day fixed for the pronunciamiento, but he did not know a syllable about the plans arranged by Don Sebastian and his adherents. As the plot was to burst out in Mexico, the President had filled the capital with troops, and called in those on whose fidelity he thought he could reckon with the greatest certainty.

But his preparations were necessarily restricted to this, and he had been constrained to wait till the revolution commenced.

It burst forth with the suddenness of a peal of thunder at twenty places simultaneously, at about the second hour of the tarde. The President, who was at once informed, and who had only come to the circus in order not to be invested in the government palace, instantly took the measures he thought most efficacious.

The news, however, rapidly arrived, and became worse and worse, and the insurrection was assuming frightful proportions. The revolters at first tried to instal themselves on the Plaza Mayor in order to seize the government palace; but being

repulsed with loss, after a very serious contest, they ambuscaded themselves in Tacuba, Secunda Monterilla, and San Augustin streets, erected barricades, and exchanged a sharp fire with the faithful troops.

The cannon roared in the square, and the balls made large gaps in the ranks of the insurgents, who replied with yells of rage and increased firing.

Colonel Lupo had taken possession of two city gates, which he burned down, and through which fresh reinforcements reached the insurgents, who now proclaimed themselves masters of one-third of the city. The foreign merchants, established in Mexico, had hoisted their national flags over their houses, in which they remained shut up, and suffering great anxiety.

The President was still standing motionless in the centre of the circus, frowning at each new message, or angrily striking the pommel of his saddle with his clenched fist. All at once a man glided secretly between his horse's legs, and gently touched his boot. The general turned round quickly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, on recognizing him. "At last! Well, Curumilla?"

But the Indian, without answering, thrust a folded paper into his hand, and disappeared as rapidly as he had come. The general eagerly scanned the letter, which only contained these words, written in French—"All is going on well. Charge vigorously."

The general's face grew brighter; he drew himself up haughtily, and brandishing his sword with a martial air, shouted in a voice heard by all, "Forward, Muchachos!"

Then, digging his spurs into his horse's sides, he galloped out of the circus, followed by the greater part

of the troops, the remainder receiving orders to hold their present position until further warning.

"Now," said the President to the officers who pressed round him, "the game is won; within an hour the insurrection will be conquered."

In fact matters had greatly altered. This is what had occurred:

Valentine, as we said, had taken a house in Tacuba Street, and another in the vicinity of the San Lazaro gate. During the night that preceded the pronunciamiento, four hundred resolute soldiers, commanded by faithful officers, were introduced into the house in Tacuba Street, where they remained so well hidden that no one suspected their presence. A similar number of troops were stowed away in the house at the San Lazaro gate.

Don Martial, at the head of a large body of men, slipped into the small house belonging to the capataz, and, being warned by the latter so soon as the general had gone off to attend the review, he passed into his mansion through the masked door we know, and occupied it without striking a blow.

The Tigrero straightway set a trap, in which several of the principal chiefs of the insurgents were caught, believing that they would find General Guerrero at home, and were at once made prisoners.

These three points occupied, they waited. Colonel Lupo had attacked the San Lazaro gate so vigorously and unexpectedly, that it was impossible to prevent him burning it. A very obstinate fight at once began, and the colonel, after a brave resistance, had been at length compelled to retreat and fall back on the main body of the insurgents, who were still masters, or nearly so, of the centre of the city.

We have mentioned that in Mexico

all the houses are flat-roofed; hence, in any revolution, the scenes in the street are repeated on the terraces of the houses; for the tactics adopted in such cases are to line these terraces with soldiers. Through a strange fatality the insurgents, while seizing the principal streets, had forgotten, or rather neglected to occupy the houses, as they believed themselves masters of the situation.

All at once the terraces in Tacuba Street, looking on the Plaza Mayor, were covered with sharpshooters, who began a tremendous fire on the insurgents collected beneath them. The same manœuvre was simultaneously executed in Monterilla and San Augustin Streets, and the terraces of the palace were covered with troops also.

The artillerymen, who had hitherto fired at long range, now brought up their guns almost within pistol-shot of the streets, and, in spite of the musketry-fire of the insurgents, bravely posted their batteries and began hurling showers of canister among the defenders of the barricades.

Almost simultaneously, the troops faithful to the government appeared in the rear of the rebels, and being supported by the sharpshooters on the terraces, charged vigorously to the incessantly repeated cry of "Mejico, Mejico, Independencia!"

The insurgents felt they were lost, for they were caught between three fires; still they offered a courageous resistance, for, knowing that if they fell alive into the hands of the conqueror, they would be mercilessly shot, they allowed themselves to be killed with Indian stoicism, and did not yield an inch of ground.

The general was in a terrible rage; without a hat, his face blackened with gunpowder, and his

uniform torn in several places, he leapt his horse over the corpses, and dashed blindly into the thick of the government troops, followed by a small band of friends, who bravely let themselves be killed at his side.

The fight was positively degenerating into a massacre; the two parties, as unhappily always happens in civil wars, fought with the greater fury and obstinacy because brothers were contending against brothers, and many of them, for whom politics were only a pretext, took advantage of the medley to satiate personal hatred and avenge old insults.

However, this could not go on for long thus, and it was necessary to get out of the situation at all risks. General Guerrero, unaware of the occupation of his house, resolved to fight his way thither, barricade himself, and obtain an honorable capitulation for himself and his comrades.

No sooner was the plan conceived than the execution was attempted. Don Sebastian collected round him all the fighting men left, and formed them into a small band—for the canister and bullets had made frightful ravages in the ranks of the insurgents—and placed himself at their head.

"Forward, forward!" he shouted as he rushed at the enemy.

His men followed him with yells of fury. The collision was terrible, the fight fearful; for four or five minutes a funeral silence brooded over this confused mass of combatants, who attacked each so savagely. They stabbed each other mercilessly, disdaining to use their firearms, and preferring as a speedier resource, the sharp points of their sabres and bayonets.

At length the President's troops fell back slightly, the insurgents took advantage of it to redouble their efforts, which were already superhuman, and reached the general's house. The doors were broken open in an instant, and all rushed pell-mell into the courtyard. They were saved! since they had at last reached the shelter where they hoped to defend themselves.

At this moment a frightful thing happened; the gallery commanding the courtyard and the stairs was entirely occupied by soldiers, and so soon as the insurgents appeared, the muskets were pointed down at them, a tornado of fire passed over them like the blast of death; and in a second a mass of corpses covered the ground.

The insurgents, terrified by this sudden attack, which they were so far from anticipating, hurriedly fell back, instinctively seeking an outlet by which to escape. The tumult then became terrible, and the massacre assumed the proportions of an organized butchery. Driven back into the courtyard by the troops who pursued them, and met there by those who had attacked them and now charged at the bayonet point, these wretched men, rendered senseless by terror, did not dream any longer of employing their weapons, but falling on their knees before their executioners, and clasping their trembling hands, they implored the mercy of the troops, who, intoxicated by the smell of blood, and affected by that horrible murder-fever which seizes upon even the coolest man on the battle-field, felled them, like oxen in the shambles, and plunged their sabres and bayonets into their bodies with grins of delight and ferocious laughter, and felt a horrible pleasure in

seeing their victims writhe with heart-breaking cries in the last convulsions of death.

General Don Sebastian, though wounded, and who seemed to have been protected by a charm throughout this scene of carnage, defended himself like a lion against several soldiers, who tried in vain to transfix him with their bayonets. Leaning against a column he whirled his sabre round his head, evidently seeking death, but wishful to sell his life as dearly as possible.

Suddenly Valentine cleft his way through the combatants, followed by Belhumeur, Black Elk, and Curumilla, who were engaged in warding off the blows the soldiers incessantly made at him, and reached the general.

"Ah!" the latter said on perceiving him, "here you are at last, then."

And he dealt him a terrible blow, but Belhumeur parried it, and Valentine continued to advance.

"Withdraw," he said to the soldiers who surrounded the general, "this man belongs to me."

The soldiers, though they did not know the hunter, intimidated by the accent with which he uttered these words, and recognizing in him one of those rare men who can always impose on common natures, respectfully fell back without making the slightest objection.

The hunter threw his purse to them.

"You dare to defy the lion at bay," the general shouted, gnashing his teeth; "although attacked by dogs, he can still avenge his death."

"You will not die," the hunter said coldly; "throw away that sabre, which is now useless."

"Ah, ah!" Don Sebastian said with a grin of rage; "I am not to die; and why not, pray?"

"Because," he answered, in a cutting voice, "death would be a mercy to you, and you must be punished."

"Oh!" he shrieked, and, blinded by rage, he rushed madly at the hunter.

The latter, without falling back a step, contented himself with giving a signal. At the same moment a slip-knot fell on the general's shoulders, and he rolled on the ground with a yell of rage. Curumilla had lassoed him.

In vain did Don Sebastian attempt further resistance; after useless efforts he was reduced to utter impotence, and forced, not only to confess he had been vanquished, but to yield himself to the mercy of his conquerors. The latter, at a sign from Valentine, disarmed him first, and then bound him, so that he could not make the slightest movement.

The massacre was ended, the insurrection had been drowned in blood. The few rebels who survived the carnage were prisoners; the victors, in the first moment of enthusiasm, had shot several, and it required the most energetic interference on the part of the officers to check this rather too summary justice.

At this moment joyous shouts burst forth, and the President of the Republic entered the courtyard at the head of a large staff, glistening with embroidery.

"Ah, ah!" he said, as he took a contemptuous glance at the general, who had been thrown on the stones, "so this is the man who wished to change the institutions of this country?"

Don Sebastian did not deign to reply; but he looked at the speaker with such an expression of implacable hatred, that the President

could not endure it, and was forced to turn his head away.

"Did this man surrender?" he asked one of his officers.

"No, coward," the general answered, with clenched teeth, "I will not surrender to hangmen."

"Take this man to prison with the others," the President continued, "an example must be made; but take care that they are not insulted by the people."

"Yes," the general muttered, "ever the same system."

"A full and entire pardon," the President continued, "will be granted to the unhappy men who were led astray, and have recognized their crime. The lesson they have received was rather rough, and I am convinced that it will do them good."

"Clemency after the massacre, that is the usual way," the general said again.

The President passed without answering him, and left the courtyard. A few minutes later the prisoners were led away to prison, in spite of the efforts of the exasperated populace to massacre them on the road.

General Don Sebastian Guerrero was one of the first to appear before the tribunal. He disdained any defense, and during the whole trial preserved a gloomy silence; he was unceremoniously condemned to be shot, his estates confiscated, and his name was declared infamous.

So soon as the sentence was recorded, the general was placed in the chapel, where he was to remain three days before execution.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CAPILLA.

THE Spanish custom—a custom which has been kept up in all the old colonies of that power—of placing persons condemned to death in a chapel, requires explanation, in order that it may be thoroughly understood and appreciated, as it deserves to be.

Frenchmen, over whom the great revolution of '93 passed like a hurricane, and carried off most of their belief in its sanguinary cloak, may smile with pity and regard as a fanatic remainder from another age, this custom of placing the condemned in chapel. Among us, it is true, matters are managed much more simply: a man, when condemned by the law, eats, drinks, and remains alone in his cell. If he desire it, he is visited by the chaplain, whom he is at liberty to converse with, if he likes; if not, he remains perfectly quiet, and nobody pays any attention to him, during a period more or less long, and determined by the rejection of his appeal. Then, one fine morning, when he is least thinking of it, the governor of the prison announces to him, when he wakes, as the most simple thing in the world, that he is to be executed that same day, and only an hour is granted him to recommend his soul to the divine clemency. The fatal toilet is made by the executioner and his assistant, the condemned man is placed in a close carriage, conveyed to the place of execution, and in a twinkling launched into eternity, before he has had a moment to look round him.

Is it right or wrong to act in this way? We dare not answer, yes or no. This question is too difficult to

decide, and would lead us the further, because we should begin with asking society by what right it arrogates to itself the power of killing one of its members, and thus committing a cold-blooded assassination, under the pretext of doing justice; for we confess that we have ever been among the most determined adversaries of punishment by death, as we are persuaded that, in trying to deal a heavy blow, human justice deceives itself, and goes beyond the object, because it avenges when it ought merely to punish.

We will, therefore, repeat here what we said in a previous work, in explanation of what the Spaniards mean by the phrase "placing in chapel."

When a man is condemned to death, from that moment he is, *de facto*, cut off from that society to which he no longer belongs, through the sentence passed on him; he is consequently separated from his fellow-men.

He is shut up in a room, at one end of which is an altar; the walls are hung with black drapery, studded with silver tears, and here and there mourning inscriptions, drawn from Holy Writ. Near his bed is placed the coffin in which his body is to be deposited after execution, while two priests, who believe each other, but of whom one constantly remains in the room, say mass in turn, and exhort the criminal to repent of his crimes, and implore divine clemency. This custom, which, if carried to an extreme, would appear in our country before all, barbarous and cruel, perfectly agrees with Spanish manners, and the thoroughly believing spirit of this impressionable nation; it is intended to draw the culprit back to pious thought, and rarely fails to produce the desired effect upon him.

The general was, therefore, placed in capilla, and two monks belonging to the order of St. Francis, the most respected, and, in fact, respectable in Mexico, entered it with him.

The first hours he passed there were terrible; this proud mind, this powerful organization, revolted against adversity, and would not accept defeat. Gloomy and silent, with frowning brows, and fists clenched on his bosom, the general sought shelter like a wild beast in a corner of the room, recalling his whole life, and seeing with starts of terror the bloody victims scattered along his path, and sacrificed in turn to his devouring ambition, sadly defile before him.

Then he reverted to his early years. When residing at the Palmar, his magnificent family hacienda, his life passed away calm, pure, gentle, and tranquil, without regrets, and without desires, among his faithful servants. Then, he was so glad to be nothing, and to wish to be nothing.

By degrees his thoughts followed the bias of his recollections: the present was effaced; his contracted features grew softer, and two burning tears, the first, perhaps, this man of iron had ever shed, slowly coursed down his cheeks, which grief had hallowed.

The monks, calm and contemplative, had eagerly followed the successive changes on this eminently expressive face. They comprehended that their mission of consolation was beginning, and approached the general softly, and wept with him; then this man, whom nothing had been able to subdue, felt his soul torn asunder; the cloud that covered his eyes, melted away like the winter snow before the first sunbeam, and he fell into the arms open to receive,

him, exclaiming, with an expression of desperate grief impossible to render—

“Have mercy, heaven! have mercy!”

The struggle had been short but terrible; faith had conquered doubt, and humanity had regained its rights.

The general then had with the monks a conversation, protracted far into the night, in which he confessed all his crimes and sins, and humbly asked pardon of God whom he had outraged, and before whom he was about to appear.

The next day, a little after sunrise, one of the monks, who had been absent about an hour, returned, bringing with him the general's capataz. It had only been with extreme reluctance that Carnero had consented to come, for he justly dreaded his old master's reproaches.

Hence his surprise was extreme at being received with a smile, and kindly, and on finding that the general did not make the slightest allusion to his treachery, which the evidence before the court-martial had fully revealed.

Carnero looked inquiringly at the two monks, for he did not dare put faith in his master's words, and each moment expected to hear him burst out into reproaches. But nothing of the sort took place; the general continued the conversation as he had begun it, speaking to him gently and kindly.

At the moment when the capataz was about to withdraw, the general stopped him.

“One moment,” he said to him; “you know Don Valentine, the French hunter, for a time I so long cherished an insensate hatred?”

“Yes,” Carnero stammered.

“Be kind enough to ask him to grant me the favor of a short visit;

he is a noble-hearted man, and I am convinced that he will not refuse to come. I should be glad if he consented to bring with him Don Martial, the Tigrero, who has so much cause to complain of me, as well as my niece, Dona Anita de Torrès. Will you undertake this commission, the last I shall doubtless give you?”

“Yes, general,” the capataz answered, affected in spite of himself by such gentleness.

“Now go; be happy and pray for me, for we shall never meet again.”

The capataz went out in a very different frame of mind from that in which he had entered the capilla, and hastened off to Valentine. The hunter was not at home, for he had gone to the presidential palace, but he returned almost immediately. The capataz gave the message which his old master had entrusted him with for him.

“I will go,” the hunter said simply, and he dismissed him.

Curumilla was at once sent off to Mr. Rallier's quinta with a letter, and during his absence Valentine had a long conversation with Belhumeur and Black Elk. At about five in the evening, a carriage entered the courtyard of Valentine's house at a gallop; it contained Mr. Rallier, Anita, and Don Martial.

“Thanks!” he said, on seeing them.

“You ordered me to come, so I obeyed as usual,” the Tigrero answered.

“You were right, my friend.”

“And now what do you want of us?”

“That you should accompany me to the place whither I am going at this moment.”

“Would it be indiscreet to ask you——”

"Where?" the hunter interrupted him with a laugh. "Not at all; I am going to lead you, Dona Anita, and the persons here present, to the capilla in which General Guerrero is confined."

"The capilla?" the Tigrero exclaimed in amazement, "for what purpose?"

"What does that concern you? The general has requested to see you, and you cannot refuse the request of a man who has but a few hours left to live."

The Tigrero hung his head without answering.

"Oh! I will go!" Dona Anita exclaimed impulsively, as she wiped away the tears that ran down her cheeks.

"You are a woman, señorita, and therefore good and indulgent," the hunter said; then turning to the Tigrero, he said with a slight accent of reproach, "you have not yet answered me, Don Martial."

"Since you insist, Don Valentine, I will go," he at length answered, with an effort.

"I do not insist, my friend; I only ask, that is all."

"Come, Martial, I implore you," Dona Anita said to him gently.

"Your will be done in this as in all other things," he said. "I am ready to follow you, Don Valentine."

Valentine, Dona Anita, Mr. Rallier, and Don Martial got into the carriage. The two Canadians and the chief followed them on horseback, and they proceeded at a gallop to the chapel where the condemned man was confined.

All along the road they found marks of the obstinate struggle which had deluged the city with blood a few days previously; the barricades had not been entirely removed, and though the distance was, in reality, very short, they did

not reach the prison till nightfall, owing to the detours they were forced to make.

Valentine begged his friends to remain outside, and only entered with Dona Anita and the Tigrero. The general was impatiently expecting them, and testified a great joy on perceiving them.

The young lady could not restrain her emotion, and threw herself into her uncle's arms with an outburst of passionate grief. The general pressed her tenderly to his bosom, and kissed her on the forehead.

"I am the more affected by these marks of affection, my child," he said, with much emotion, "because I have been very harsh to you. Can you ever forgive me the sufferings I have caused you?"

"Oh, uncle, speak not so. Are you not, alas! the only relation I have remaining?"

"For a very short time," he said, with a sad smile, "that is the reason why I ought, without further delay, to provide for your future."

"Do not talk about that at such a moment, uncle," she continued, bursting into tears.

"On the contrary, my child, it is at this moment, when I am going to leave you, that I am bound to insure you a protector. Don Martial, I have done you great wrong; here is my hand; accept it as that of a man who has completely recognized his faults, and sincerely repents the evil he has done."

The Tigrero, more affected than he liked to display, took a step forward, and cordially pressed the hand offered him.

"General," he said, in a voice which he tried in vain to render firm, "this moment, which I never dared hope to see, fills me with joy, but at the same time with grief."

"Well, you can do something for me by proving to me that you have really forgiven me."

"Speak, général, and if it is in my power——," he exclaimed warmly.

"I believe so," Don Sebastian answered, with his sad smile. "Consent to accept my niece from my hand, and marry her at once in this chapel."

"Oh, general!" he began, choking with emotion.

"Uncle, at this awful moment!" the young lady murmured, timidly.

"Allow me the supreme consolation of dying under the knowledge that you are happy. Don Valentine, you have doubtless brought some of your friends with you?"

"They are awaiting your commands, general," the hunter answered.

"Let them come in, in that case, for time presses."

One of the monks had prepared every thing beforehand.

When the hunters and the French banker entered, followed by Curumilla, and the officer commanding the capilla guard, who had been warned beforehand, the general walked eagerly toward them.

"Senores," he said, "I would ask you to do me the honor of witnessing the marriage of my niece, Dona Anita de Torrès, with this caballero."

The new-comers bowed respectfully. At a signal from one of the Franciscans they knelt down and the ceremony began. It lasted hardly twenty minutes, but never had a marriage mass been read or listened to with more pious fervor. When it was ended, the witnesses wished to retire.

"One moment, senores, if you please," the general said to them. "I now wish to make you witnesses of a great reparation."

They stopped, and the general walked up to Valentine.

"Caballero," he said to him, "I know all the motives of hatred you have against me, and those motives I allow to be just. I am now in the same position in which I placed Count de Prébois Craneé, your dearest friend. Like him, I shall be shot to-morrow at daybreak; but with this difference, that he fell as a martyr to a holy cause, and innocent of the crimes of which I accused him, while I am guilty, and have deserved the sentence passed on me. Don Valentine, I repent from the bottom of my heart the iniquitous murder of your friend. Don Valentine, do you forgive me?"

"General Don Sebastian Guerrero, I forgive you the murder of my friend," the hunter answered, in a firm voice. "I forgive you the life of grief to which I am henceforth condemned by you."

"You pardon me unreservedly?"

"Unreservedly I do."

"Thanks! We were made to love instead of hate each other. I misunderstood you; but yours is a great and noble heart. Now, let death come, and I shall accept it gladly; for I feel convinced that God will have pity on me on account of my sincere repentance. Be happy, niece, with the husband of your choice. Senores; all, accept my thanks. Don Valentine, once more I thank you; and now leave me all, for I no longer belong to the world, so let me think of my salvation."

"But one word," Valentine said. "General, I have forgiven you, and it is now my turn to ask your pardon. I have deceived you."

"Deceived me!"

"Yes: take this paper. The President of the Republic, employing his sovereign right of mercy,

has, on my pressing entreaty, revoked the sentence passed on you. You are free."

His hearers burst into a cry of admiration.

The general turned pale; he tottered, and for a moment it was fancied that he was about to fall. A cold perspiration stood on his temples. Dona Anita sprang forward to support him, but he repulsed her gently, and, with a great effort, exclaimed, in a choking voice—

"Don Valentine, Don Valentine, such then is your revenge. Oh, blind, blind that I was to form such an erroneous opinion of you! You condemn me to live. Well, be it so; I accept, and will not deceive your expectations. Fathers," he said, turning to the monks, lead me to your monastery. General Guerrero is dead, and henceforth I shall be a monk of your order."

Don Sebastian's conversion was sincere. Grace had touched him, and he persevered. Two months after professing, he died in the Franciscan Monastery, crushed by remorse and worn out by the cruel penance he inflicted on himself.

Two days after the scene we have described, Valentine and his companions left Mexico, and returned to Sonora. On reaching the frontier, the hunter, in spite of the pressing entreaties of his friends, separated from them, and returned to the desert.

Don Martial and Dona Anita settled in Mexieo, near the Ralliers. A month after Valentine's departure, Dona Helena returned to the

convent, and at the end of a year, in spite of the entreaties of her family, who were surprised at so strange a resolution, which nothing apparently explained, the young lady took the vows.

When I met Valentine Guillois on the banks of the Rio Joaquin, some time after the events recorded in this long story, he was going with Curumilla to attempt a hazardous expedition across the Rocky Mountains, from which, he said to me, with that soft, melancholy smile which he generally assumed when speaking to me, he *hoped* never to return.

* * * * *

I accompanied him for several days, and then we were compelled to separate. He pressed my hand, and, followed by his dumb friend, he entered the mountains. For a long time I looked after him, for I involuntarily felt my heart contracted by a sad foreboding. He turned round for the last time, waved his hand in farewell, and disappeared round a bend of the track.

I was fated never to see him again.

Since then nothing has been heard of him, or of Curumilla. All my endeavors to join them, or even obtain news of them, were vain.

Are they still living?—no one can say. Darkness has settled down over these two magnificent men, and time itself will, in all probability, never remove the vail that conceals their fate; for all, unhappily, leads me to suppose that they perished in that gloomy expedition from which Valentine *hoped*, alas! never to return.

THE END.

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